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IDA CRAVEN.

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# IDA CRAVEN.

BY  
H. M. CADELL.

*IN TWO VOLUMES. VOL. II.*



HENRY S. KING & Co., LONDON.

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TO

A. L. S. & J. B. B.



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# IDA CRAVEN.

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## CHAPTER I.

### *FACT AND FICTION.*

THE next day the station was ringing with many coloured accounts of Mrs. Craven's adventure up the Khyber. The coffee-shop of the 5th N.I. had got hold of one of these to this effect, that Linwood and Mrs. Craven had been wandering about the Khyber hills on horseback, and had been set upon by a dozen ruffians. Linwood had killed three, and the rest had run away with their horses. And some one was improving it with the further addition that they, Mrs. Craven and Linwood, had been carried to a tower and had there found Craven, Stanley, and Saadut Khan holding a conference; and this

of course lent itself to the suggestion that Linwood was running away with Mrs. Craven, and had been brought back by the virtuously indignant Momunds. Major MacPherson, who had listened for long in silence, here broke in, "You fellows are talking awful rot. That little Mrs. Craven has a deal too much sense. As for that dandy Linwood, he's a good enough rider, but he is no better than his brethren, and all those irregulars are cox-combs. As to the attack, and the rescue, I don't believe a word of it. Some one will have fired a shot because his brother was married, or his grandmother was dead—something of the sort; and doubtless the Cravens did go picnicking in the direction of the Khyber: hence the story."

"You unbelieving heretic! You always doubt everything. But Hudson told me that there was a shot fired at Mrs. Craven," said a young sub with an air of great importance.

"Well it did not hit," said Mac. "As for

the attack and the stealing of horses and that nonsense, I saw them all riding into the station together yesterday myself."

"But Linwood was with them," said one of the lovers of the marvellous.

"Which does not prove anything you may see fit to say about him," said another, "but I went to tiffin at their mess myself the very day to find out what was up. Stanley did not seem to know what I was talking of. He's a bit supercilious in his civil way; and said at last, Oh yes, Mrs. Craven had been a little alarmed, but there was really no cause for it; and Linwood said he did nothing, and never saw any one less frightened than Mrs. Craven. And when I asked whether some one did not fire a shot, Stanley took me up short, and said, "Yes, perfect volleys; I went up the Khyber with Craven and Maxwell, and Faize Mohammad's people fired to welcome us."

The well-meant effort of Stanley and Hugh

to make no clatter about Mrs. Craven's name, resulted in the opinion that there was something very bad indeed, and that they wanted to hush it up.

"You may just as well," said MacPherson, "for anything you know about it, shut up, you fellows; and if you can't, put some one else's name into the story, keep off Mrs. Craven's. She is not that sort of woman; and Linwood's her first cousin; he and Craven are the best friends in the world. I met them together this morning. The truth of it is that Craven sent Linwood reconnoitring somewhere, and that Stanley got into trouble trying to buy horses up the pass."

With these bold assertions, which were so far founded on fact, that he had heard that Linwood was some one's cousin, and thought the rest was very likely to be true, did the good-natured old soldier muddle the story with the result of taking the sting out of it. It was a system of his. "People will talk



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scandal in India," he would say, "but the best way to make it harmless is to muddle it. Defend the principal person accused, and then load the story with ornament. It will amuse a greater number of people, and then tumble to pieces sooner for its own weight. As for abolishing scandal, abolish the heat, and the niggers, and brandy and soda, and then you may have a chance. Not before certainly. Why if an angel from heaven were to come and live in an Indian station, every coffee-shop in the place would have a story about her in a week, unless she were vilely ugly, which one would not expect."

In the commissioner's home came some days of incessant anxiety. The day of the picnic had brought tidings that something very serious was up, and that the storm which had been for some time brewing had begun to blow. The threatened movement on the part of the Syuds and their Hindustani followers had taken place, and meant nothing less than the reoccupation of their old stronghold of

Sittana, backed by the Jydoons and the Otmanzais, the holders of the country for which they were moving, in direct defiance of treaty obligations.

The fortress of Sittana was very near the British frontier, and had been for a very long time a hotbed of all sorts of mischief. From thence had issued innumerable plundering parties, and to Sittana had been for long taken the wealth subscribed for the purpose of religious resistance on the plains of India.

After the great convulsion of 1857, the colony had been reinforced by the unsuccessful Mohammadan ruffianage of Oude and the North-West; and though never at best very strong in numbers, was really unique in the quality of its seditious and bitter feeling towards the ruling power. This had been so patent that the unseating of the colony had been the object of an expedition in 1858.

But the nest of scorpions had only been

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made to change its quarters; and at Mulka, on the northern slope of the Mahabun, was soon as active as ever. The tribes who held these northern slopes being a considerable distance from our frontier, it had not been easy to reach them; but we had taken distinct pledges from the Jydoons and Otmanzais that they should not again occupy the nearer and more dangerous post. But tired of the comparative unsatisfactoriness of the Mulka retreat, and taking advantage of a tribal dispute among the Otmanzais, they had now returned to their old ground, and the work of 1858 was undone, and would have to be done over again.

The state of the British side of the frontier was peculiar. Much of the land along it being held by the families of the old chiefs on military tenure. The conventional supposition was, that the feudal chief could always take care of himself, and on any occasion of trouble, send a contingent to help the imperial forces. As a matter-of-

fact they were utterly helpless, and in a great fright as soon as any real danger made its appearance.

Telegrams, orders, and reports poured in on the commissioner from all hands, and had to be read and thought over; and measures had to be taken for immediate safety, and foresight was needed to prepare for eventualities. All this Arthur Craven did to very great purpose, writing, planning, organizing. It was well for England that she had such a man on the spot at the time. The frontier was at once put in a state of defence, and preparations were made for establishing a state of blockade, to check any present efforts on the part of the Syuds; and all with a view to future punishment for them, and for the tribes who had so far aided them. Saadut was despatched along the frontier to see as much and be seen as little as possible; even to cross it sometimes, and feel to the bottom of the loyalty of such chiefs as were still minded to be civil to us.

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He was to cross the Indus, and go up its left bank (the British bank), and bring back some information as to the temper of Shifar Khan, the minister and man of supreme power in Umb,—a district much exposed, and which we should probably have to defend; and it was therefore important that our plans for their good should not, if we could help it, be disconcerted by the half-heartedness of the Umb authorities.

Thus Saadut Khan had his full part in the work and anxiety of the time, and was able to help his friend in a most important degree. He had known Syud Mohammad Shah well at one time; and though it formed no part of his official instructions, it was among the possibilities that in the hot-bed of sedition itself, Saadut would try to reason the Syud out of his state of infatuation. He had very little time or thought left for minor matters, though what he had seen and heard at Jumrood had made a great impression on him. He liked less than

ever Arthur's fair young wife, who seemed so listless at home, and yet who could get into such a scrape in company with some stranger gentleman. Too quiet at home, too adventurous abroad, seemed a very bad account to give of any woman, and that woman his friend's wife.

Ida, heedless of the talk of the coffee-shops, or the ill will of her husband's friend, was in her way a good deal excited by the turn public affairs had taken. She was proud that Arthur should be holding in his hands the springs of the big machine of state in such troublous times, and was not sorry that things were in disorder that he might show how capable he was ; but all in an outside way, for she could not lose the feeling of only artificially belonging to him and to this bit of life.

Mrs. Maxwell had had still more anxiety about her little son since the day of the picnic. The child had been worse and better for some time past, and the last few

days had been so much worse that Henry Maxwell, who had engaged a house for her at Murree, was urging her to go at once. She was very much averse to leaving home and its duties, for the forced idleness of life at a hill station. She doubted much how her husband would stand Peshawur and its fever season, and wished above all things to stay and see. Then her barrack women required more care at this time than any other, though some were away at a standing camp in the hills, not far from Murree, which had been kindly established by the Punjāb government.

It thus happened that Mary resisted the doctor's orders in the matter of little Hugh for longer than was wise; and it was not till a day of serious illness on his part brought her to her senses, and the consideration of what was most important, that she decided on flight.

But one morning, when the valley was still ringing with the great news from beyond the frontier, Ida looked in upon Mary

after her ride, and found her elbow-deep in a big camel-trunk, and with many other signs of moving about her.

"What, Mary! are you really off?" said Ida. "I had no idea you were going so soon."

"Nor had I till yesterday," she replied; "but the child looked so ill, and was so ill all day, that I felt that there was really nothing for it but flight. His eyes have been looking unwholesomely intelligent and sad for some time back; and after this last attack I could not hope to keep him well through August and September, which people speak of as the worst months here. So I believe I am right, though it is sorely against my will that I go."

"To listen to her," said Maxwell from the tea-table, with a look of mischief in his eyes, "you would take her for the martyr-mother of the period. All that sounds perfectly beautiful, but who would believe that I had to say that I would take the



child myself, with or without leave, to bring about this desirable state of mind?"

"Dear little man!" said his mother, quite coolly. "It is not lack of care for him, but I unfortunately happen to think of other things and folk too. It is a privilege of the male mind to be only able to take in one idea at a time."

"All right, Mary," he answered. "But if that idea happens to be the essential one for the occasion, it is all that is wanted."

So as the sun was setting that evening, Henry Maxwell and his wife and child went out of the station as fast as two strong horses could carry them.

Henry Maxwell did not intend to go far with his home party, but he went to see them fairly started, and to have a play with his little white baby, feeling very thankful to have him at last out of the station of Peshawur, on his way to a more wholesome atmosphere, and to see the last of his brave young wife whom he had sent away

the more pitilessly that her absence would make an awful blank for him.

They talked cheerfully enough of plans and prospects, keeping as much as possible to the surface of things. Mary was determined to part happily, it would be foolish not to do so ; but yet she needed every bit of her motherliness to keep her from rebelling at the necessity that sent her from her post just at the time she was most wanted.

She looked very stern and artificially calm when they came to the place where Harry's favourite charger was standing ready to take him back to the station, and said steadily enough, "Good-bye ; take care of yourself." The boy had gone to sleep, and with one kiss to the child and another to his wife, Maxwell jumped down from the cart and mounted, and they bowled away.

Mary put her head down beside the child, and fought it out. A sob or two came as a relief from the artificial calm, then a feeling of misery somewhat disproportioned to

the occasion came over her, and she sat up very sorely conscious of the burden of life. Those of us who know sorrow more real and more bitter than hers, need not be contemptuous of her. She was young, quick of feeling, and strong of will; and on the whole, when some allowance is made for thoughts of Frankie over the seas, very happy, and it is the happy that sorrow wounds most keenly.

They galloped along drawn by government horses at a good ten miles an hour,—along the white road, passing here and there a village, sometimes a train of government bullock carts, with their white bullocks and black tarpaulins, going along at a leisurely pace, with the inevitable but gentle sound of hubble-bubble heard through the creaking of the cart wheels. On—on, past Nowshera and its big barracks, and desolate white gate-posts marking where the old station once stood, before the Cabul River had swept it away; here and there she saw

.

glimpses of the Cabul River shining white in the moonlight.

Mary got interested at last, and, content that the boy was sleeping, quietly resigned herself to look and think. The new ground and the rapid motion kept her well awake, but she was resting—a thing not to be despised after the day's fatigue of preparation.

At last some hills were seen in the dim uncertain distant light. They were part of the Salt-Range come sooner than she had expected them; and soon, after a great many jolts, a very sharp descent, and some shouts, they halted at the gate of India.

They had now to leave their comfortable carriage. Some men appeared who seized on their little luggage; the ayah took the sleeping child, and they walked down to the river bank. The full moon made it almost as light as day; of course there was no sign of a ferry-boat, and the bridge being down there was nothing for it but to wait, and trust to the howls of the men round her to

produce the boat, which they did in time. It was a good strong boat, large, built on an English model; and Mary, boy, and ayah, got into the stern, the luggage in the centre. It was pulled by half a dozen sturdy boat-men who now started with a shout.

There had been a good deal of rain in the hills, and the snows were melting higher up, and the grand old river was very full. A little distance above Attock, the Cabul River which we have just mentioned joins the Indus, in a wide shallow bed, forming at some seasons almost an inland sea. Then after descending together for a little distance the united flood narrows suddenly to sweep round the rock on which Attock fort is built.

They rowed at first up the river, keeping close to the Khyrabad side, that they might, allowing for the force of the water correctly strike the landing-place on the Attock side: a task requiring strong arms and good management at that season of the year,

when the river rushes through its comparatively narrow channel at a splendid pace. Mary was keenly alive to the beauties of the scene, and very careless of its risks. Her healthy nature could always enjoy, and here was an exceptional chance for it. It was an entrancing summer night, clear, bright, and breezy. The noble river came tearing down on them, striving its best to carry them off, and across the water she could see the steep black rocks crowned with the battlements of the old Sikh fort, standing clear out against the sky. To the left was another historical building, Akbar's Serai, and above, a meagre trace of India's present masters,—the white travellers' bungalow, which Mary did not care to notice.

Years have passed since then, but nothing will ever efface from her memory the scene of that night; and still the river and the rock, the moonlight and the ruins are as vividly clear to the eye of memory as the rock was then against the sky.

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From that time the little fellow gained strength, and when they reached Murree was soon the brightest of English boys, comforting his mother better than anything for her forced absence from home.

## CHAPTER II.

### *HUGH AND IDA.*

JULY passed away without any active steps being taken on the part of the Punjāb government to meet the frontier difficulty. Not that there was any hope of reducing the offenders to reason by any other means than a recourse to arms, but the season was unfavourable, and it was decided to keep up a blockade along the border till the end of the hot weather should leave the plains and valleys safe for European troops.

After Mary Maxwell's departure, Ida was more alone than ever. Arthur was very little at home, and very busy during the hours of the day that in more peaceable times were given to relaxation. It was a life of ceaseless care and occupation. He was not a man to shrink from responsi-



bility in any form; indeed, he liked it on the whole, and carried the load lightly enough. At the price of incessant activity and constant thought, he felt he was doing his human best to direct the great affairs and protect the mighty interests under his hand, and so was happy. What more could man do? He was often absent from home for days together, riding about the disturbed districts, to hear with his own ears and see with his own eyes the actual state of things, and to bring his personal influence to bear anywhere where it might be wanted.

If the helpless feudatories were a great vexation, so often were his active subordinates no inconsiderable anxiety. To any one who knows the somewhat unhealthy activity of the Anglo-Indian official in presence of a row, this will be easily understood. They seemed to have a speciality for finding things wrong, almost a power of creating disaffection. Craven's great object

for the next few months, till an expedition could be sent to settle the matter, was to keep the quarrel to the point, and to avoid having a national revolt or a foreign war on his hands instead of a frontier row. Now the love of excitement, much more than the fears, of the men about him, tended to exaggerate the difficulty; they all longed to save the empire, but the soldier-statesman in charge was determined that the empire should not need saving this time.

So, instead of being driven to rebellion by harshness and suspicion, our feudatories were aided in every way, but aided in such sort that the help could at any moment be turned to a practical check on their actions. Matters were to get no worse, and the frontier was to be blockaded.

Such was the very simple plan, and the fashion in which it was carried out was very workmanlike; but as a necessary consequence,

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Arthur Craven was very busy, and saw little of his young wife. He had again suggested the hills, but had found her so really anxious to stay that he had decided to press it no longer; and this more particularly, that, though not very bright, she was rather better than worse, and seemed to understand now the need for his frequent absence. The reason of this was not far to seek, and it was, on the whole, a pity.

After the little adventure in the hills that morning, it had seemed quite natural that Hugh Linwood should come more about the Cravens' house. Arthur liked him in the somewhat unappreciative manner that a much older man likes a younger one, and had asked him there. Ida had now got over the uncomfortable feeling of the past, and was willing to take Hugh as a pleasant piece of the present; only allowing him to be more of a friend than any man had been permitted to be before, because, as she put it to her-

self, he was a friend, and nothing more could be made of the fact. So her conscience being quite quiet on the subject, Hugh was a good deal about. He managed to drop in pretty often to coffee-shop when his work was done for the morning; and sometimes he and Woolett would come in together of an evening. It was a way of the house that men friends were welcome for an hour or so after dinner. Colonel Craven had taken a great fancy to Woolett, and liked to talk to the able young enthusiast, who was not so much a doctor but that the scientific and the scholarly side of many subjects found in him a keen student; and who was, by the way, as he was much else, an archæologist of no mean attainments. Then, he had made a duty of speaking, with more or less of fluency, all the tongues that were spoken in the regiment to which he was attached,—and this meant a large command of northern

dialects,—and thus was able to pick up a great deal of miscellaneous information from the men.

In his short sojourn at Peshawur he had made a considerable acquaintance among the better classes in the city.

“I have no time for books,” he would say; “but as I must see a good deal of men I make them do as well.”

In his capacity of doctor, he had no opposing interests to his patients, and his talk met, in consequence, with none of the suspicion that must attend the inquiries of a civil or political official.

It interested Craven to see the impression made on Woolett by things that were of too much importance to him to be looked at by himself without bias, and often felt glad of some bit of criticism cast up from this fresh point of view.

But this is not Hugh and Ida. They were in a way interested in these discussions. Ida very genuinely so for the

when the river rushes through its comparatively narrow channel at a splendid pace. Mary was keenly alive to the beauties of the scene, and very careless of its risks. Her healthy nature could always enjoy, and here was an exceptional chance for it. It was an entrancing summer night, clear, bright, and breezy. The noble river came tearing down on them, striving its best to carry them off, and across the water she could see the steep black rocks crowned with the battlements of the old Sikh fort, standing clear out against the sky. To the left was another historical building, Akbar's Serai, and above, a meagre trace of India's present masters,—the white travellers' bungalow, which Mary did not care to notice.

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time; and Hugh often enough would enter into them: first that the line of thought was sufficiently familiar, and mainly, that they were among the ways of the house; and the mere being one of the Cravens' inner circle was a pleasure that it was better not to analyze.

But far more than these evenings of general talk did he like his early morning visits, when he often got a long *tête-à-tête* with Ida. These occasions were very enjoyable to them both; they seemed to have much in common, there was much natural sympathy between them, and their talk was a real pleasure to both, without the element of personal feeling being anywhere visible in it.

Of course it was very dangerous, taken by any common-sense standard; but Ida, finding that Hugh did not fit well to any of the rules that governed her conduct with men at large, chose to take high ground about him, and so bade adieu to common-sense.



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To have had any one else talking of old friends and new books for an hour of a morning would have struck her as not to be stood; but Hugh was not any one else. The little half-forgotten episode of four years ago was rather a reason for feeling confidence in him. It was so long ago, she was married, and he was perfectly kind and simple. In her ignorance of the world, she would have expected a more melodramatic attitude from an old lover if there was any need to fear him. It was an interest to have him about, and really so very pleasant that she asked herself very few questions, and so got no warning of the true nature of the ground on which she was standing. To call her innocent would be almost a slur on her, as suggesting a doubt where there was none.

Hugh, of course, had not the same excuse to make; but then he had always had a gift of seeing matters, however much they might involve other people, very much from

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riding with her alone, never haunting her in public, even making these morning visits, which, somehow, hardly struck him as likely to create talk, not over frequent.

But at any rate this degree of self-control and these good intentions made him feel quite excellent, and able to look with supreme contempt on the "wretched cads who dangle about after a woman just to be talked about." He really loved her, and would make no love to her : such was the resolve that made him feel so good and blameless as to be quite justified in playing with fire.

Woolett was not so occupied with his professional work, and the many things that so naturally to him seemed to grow out of it, but that he had not made a very shrewd guess at the state of his friend's mind, and he was feeling some anxiety as to what was to be the upshot of it.

It was when they were serving in China, and at the very time that Hugh was nursing him so tenderly through the illness we have

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mentioned, that the news of Ida's marriage had reached Linwood. Woolett was better, but still needed most assiduous care, and received it from this young soldier of whom he had known so little before, and of whom he had been rather careless as one of the many. It chanced that one evening young Linwood came to his tent to see to his arrangements for the night, and to be sure that all that could be wanted was at hand. This time had come to be a season of pleasure to them both, for they often for a hour or two fell into some kind of talk that went well below the surface. To Woolett this was natural enough, for not being conventional, he lived after his character, and spoke his real thoughts if he spoke at all. Hugh, on the contrary, had lived very much as if life was all soldiering or sport, as if all of him that was not given to professional work was taken up with horses, dogs, guns, and the rest of the small accessories of a young man's life under the circumstances. But on these evenings, Woolett

had broken through all this, and got well below the surface, and had found, spite of his foregone conclusions, very much to love and to be even surprised at in the kindly young soldier who was of so much use to him.

It chanced on this particular evening Hugh came late, and Woolett at once noticed that something was wrong. There was an air of quiet restraint about him that was utterly unnatural. He did everything silently, gently, and was so evidently out of heart, that Woolett's mind soon turned to the fact that mails had that day been received in camp; and when, instead of sitting down on the foot of the bed as usual, Hugh said, "Good-night, old fellow," and turned away, Woolett had held his hand tightly in his own, and had said, "What is wrong, Linwood? I hope you have had no bad news to-day;" and it had all come out. The wound was too fresh to have got glossed over by his customary reserve, and he had told the whole story, omitting names,

and giving very few details about the marriage—he did not know many to give, but pouring his heart out over the past, and his lost hopes.

The blow was a very heavy one, and it was a long time before Hugh was himself again; but there had been real comfort in telling his sorrow, and this of course had had much to do in forming the tie that was so strong between this oddly matched pair of friends.

After they had been a little while at Peshawur, Woolett had had no great difficulty in recognizing Mrs. Craven as his friend's lost love. He ventured on no warnings,—such were generally useless—but with all the faith of a noble, kindly nature, he waited, hoping the good he knew to exist in Hugh would triumph, and that he would show himself able to be unselfish.

Oddly enough Hugh had about him a sort of latent strength of character, that made people give him credit for good he did not often work out; there were possibilities in him

that did not often reach the point of performance. This made Woolett trust him now, and it was going far to make Ida trust him, and who could tell what might be the end of that! But Woolett watched his friend anxiously, for never had the self-pleasing indolence such a chance of triumphing over the strength, or, still worse, never had that latent strength such a chance of running full force in the channel of self. It was insight that was wanted; but Hugh had fairly shut his eyes, and all of it that Ida had was employed in looking through a mist of fallacies.



## CHAPTER III.

### *IN THE MOONLIGHT.*

AUGUST passed as July had done, in a state of watchfulness. War was impending, but there was nothing done so far. It was quite late in the month when tidings were brought of a more than usually important band of plunderers being somewhere on the road to Fort Hussunkhail, bent at any rate on interrupting communications, and robbing any travellers or military stores that might be sent that way, and now and then, just for idleness' sake, burning down a village, whose loyalty was provoking to them. This would not do, and it was arranged that 300 of Stanley's men, and two H. A. guns should be sent at them, to punish them in an exemplary fashion, before they could get back across the frontier. It was decided that they should start after nightfall, so as not to come

upon them until the moon had set. The absence on temporary leave of the second in command, together with the fact that Stanley's senior subaltern was down with fever, had pointed out Hugh Linwood to command the little expedition.

Ida only heard of this at dinner, when it was mentioned by Colonel Stanley, who, with Maxwell, was dining that day at the Cravens' house. When the meal was over, they went outside, where a thick carpet had been spread, and arm chairs placed out in the moonlight. This was a favourite device of Ida's when they had evening visitors. It solved the question of smoking, which she disliked in the house, but which was, after all, such a very important adjunct to conversation for most of these men friends of Arthur's. It seemed, too, to remove the tone of talk from that of men trying to do "society," without sufficient spur to make them do it well, to natural man-talk, on whatever was uppermost in their minds at the time. They were scarcely

seated, when Hunaman came to say that the Mir Sahib had arrived, and wished to speak to Colonel Craven alone. As he rose, Ida said,—

“If you bring him back, make him speak English, Arthur. I will be very civil to him, and he shall have some good coffee, but I don’t want to be shut out by the talk being carried on in Persian.”

“I join in the petition,” said Maxwell. “I am no Persian scholar.”

“I am glad of that,” said Ida, as Arthur walked towards the house.

“Craven must be very busy now,” said Stanley. “It is a blessing for all of us, that he is standing it so well. You must be the greatest sufferer.”

“Yes,” said Ida absently, wondering how it was that she had seemed rather less than more alone of late; and she went on as if trying to find out what she did think. “Yet I am rather glad of it, too; not glad of the disturbances, but that my husband should

have so much to do with it. It is something to be making history."

Stanley smiled at her remark, and wondered if it meant genuine interest in her husband's career, or what else. At any rate it seemed to him that he would have preferred a more personal line of thought in a wife.

"It will hardly get as far as that," he said. "There is such a craze to represent all quiet and all well, to cry peace, whether there happens to be peace or not, that it is hardly possible to make a name now-a-days, unless you are concerned in a big disaster, then authorities get as frightened as they were previously careless, and make a fuss about you."

"There is no hope of a big disaster," said Ida, without much heed of what she said, feeling all this was rather beyond her.

"Nor fear, I trust, of a small one," said Stanley gravely.

And then Ida saw that she had been talking nonsense, and felt vexed with herself.

She seemed so often out of tune with the people whose good opinion she cared for, and it discouraged her much. "I am heartless, or foolish, or both," she said to herself; and then dismissed it as part of the whole that was making her life of every day, with all its smooth seeming, so much of a misfit.

Just then the tread of many hoofs, and the clatter of guns was heard along the road.

"That is the flying column," said Colonel Stanley. "I told Linwood to look in here as he passed, to see if Craven had any later information than the brigade office."

"Halt!" sounded a familiar voice, it was Hudson's, and the clatter of the guns ceased. "Halt!" sounded another that Ida knew still better; and the tread was hushed, and Hugh galloped into the compound, and pulled up sharp when he saw the chairs in the moonlight. He threw himself off his horse, and gave the bridle to a man who was standing with a large hand fan to keep off the insects.

He shook hands with Ida, and nodding to the men, he said to Stanley,—

“Well, colonel, is there anything more for me to know?”

“There was not ten minutes ago,” said Stanley, in answer. “But Saadut Khan is with the commissioner just now, and may have brought some tidings.”

“Where is he? Can I see him?” asked Hugh.

“He will be back here in a minute,” said Ida.

“I don’t like to keep the men waiting,” he said.

“It is almost as good practice as any they will get to-night, and they are really keeping very quiet. Of course you have got to go, and you may be lucky enough to catch the ruffians, but I suspect they will get safe across the frontier,” said Maxwell, who rather grudged his guns and gunners on such a doubtful errand.

“Yes, they are very quiet,” said Ida.

Indeed, but for an indefinable sense of human presence, and now and then a stamp and a whinny, you would not have suspected that behind that screen of oleanders were 350 men and as many horses.

"You have still a good deal of time," said Stanley; "and more, that you had best go at a trot past that bit of snipy country,—you know it,—a mile or so after you leave the Attock road. You stay for Craven. I will go and speak to Afzul Khan. You are lucky in having him for a second to-night, if you should have a fight, his men will follow him anywhere;" and he walked away to the compound wall to speak to the native officer, leaving Hugh and Maxwell with Ida. She sent the coolie to the house to hasten the coffee, and to tell Colonel Craven that he was wanted.

"I did not know till just now that you were going on this expedition," said Ida, to whom this news of Hugh's seemed a very realisable thing, and very much her business.

"Nor did I, Mrs. Craven, till midday. It is a piece of good luck. If Tunstall had not had fever, I should have had merely to send him off." He sat down on the carpet beside her, with the bridle, that he had taken from the coolie, in his hand, and the head of the chestnut over his shoulder.

Ida was fairly roused. All this frontier talk, all these rumours of wars, and Arthur's work, seemed like so much action in another planet compared with this party of horsemen in the road, and Hugh by her side bent on a deadly errand. It was all so real that she found herself trembling with excitement.

Maxwell did not like the look of her, and thought somebody had better talk sense, so he said,—

"I think you are foolish, Hugh, to take your chestnut on such a night's work as this."

"I dare say," he answered; "but he has seen no service as yet, and I should never



know how he could stand rough work if I did not try him; and besides, what had most to do with it," and he turned his face to Ida, "the dear old beast actually asked me to take him, and I had not the heart to refuse. I went to the stable to see who should go, and it was absurd the fuss Rapid made, as if he knew that there was something important up, and some risk of his being left behind."

He looked laughingly into her face, and met her smile, as she put out her hand to stroke Rapid's silky red mane.

Maxwell looked on with some surprise. Here were these two who had been at one time more or less engaged to each other, evidently on terms of confidence; but this sort of simple boyish talk was not what he had expected of his cousin, whom he had often called a puppy.

"I hope Craven won't be long," he said, and just then appeared Arthur and Saadut Khan walking from the house. The coffee

had just arrived, and a pile of gingerbread nuts.

"I am glad to find you here," said Craven to Hugh. "The Mir Sahib has some further information as to the whereabouts of your friends. It is expected they will attack the village of Abdul-Surra some time to-night, probably after the moon is down. Could you be there by the time it sets?"

"Yes, sir; I think so," said Hugh.

"If you could hit the time exactly, it would be as well," returned Craven, "so as to have them busy mind and body, and thus more likely to stand."

"I'll try," said Hugh. "I don't think, though, that Abdul-Surra is in my map. What place is it near?"

"I think it is not a very easy place to find in the dark," answered the other. "Saadut Khan, who knows it, says that it is some four miles off the Hussunkhail road, leaving it at Lughoo, but that you can't make a direct line for the ravines."

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"I shall have to get a village guide," said Hugh.

"It would be rather a risk in that neighbourhood to trust one," said Saadut Khan. "I will come with you, and show you the way. I know that part of the country pretty well."

Craven was disposed to interfere, being doubtful how his indefatigable aide would be able to stand another night on horseback, having spent all the previous one in the saddle. However his objections were overruled, and it was decided that a strong country bred horse of the commissioner's should be at his service for the occasion.


"Now, Mir Sahib," said Ida, "you must take some coffee before you start, and you, Hugh. The name slipped from her in her excitement quite naturally, and no one noticed it but Maxwell. "Rapid must have a gingerbread nut," she said, and took one, and fed the animal from her hand. He ate it up, whether from good manners or natural liking it is not safe to say. "You

will be riding all night," she said to Hugh, "and will be certainly hungry before morning. Can't you take some biscuits with you? Will your pouch hold some?"

"It will, a few; and it will be the first time it has ever been any use to me," he answered, pulling round the belt and opening it; not that he would eat the ginger-bread nuts, which in truth he disliked cordially, but that it was pleasant to take anything from her hand.

Stanley now returned to the group, and the horse was led up for Saadut Khan. They shook hands warmly, as men and women do when there is work on hand. Ida looked excited, and there was a possibility of a tear not far off, so at least Maxwell thought, as the two men rode away together, and the clanking of artillery and the tread of many hoofs soon told that they had started.

Hugh and the Mahomedan were very good company for each other. Hugh's



experience in his regiment had made him understand and like the better class of natives; and both were very eager about the chances of the little raid. There was real work to do, and neither of them had any room left for sentiment. Hugh was not a man to take his feelings with him into his work, and Ida would have thought less of him riding away there in the moonlight, if she had known how little he thought of her.

"Well, they have a fine night for it," said Maxwell. "I hope it won't give any of the men fever."

"Not very likely," answered Stanley. "These small excitements always do more good than harm. I only hope they may catch the marauders. The chances are against it I fear."

Craven, who had been puffing his cigar rather moodily, said at last,—

"I hope your adjutant will follow Saadut's counsel about the route and time. He knows

well what he is about; but if Linwood is impetuous he may spoil the chance."

"Trust him," said Stanley; "he is very steady. Nothing will be lost by him you may be sure."


There was another silence which was broken by Ida, who asked,—

"When shall we hear what they have done?"

"If they do anything we shall hear about it to-morrow," said Arthur. "Saadut said that he would bring the news himself."

"He is really an indefatigable fellow," said Stanley.

"Yes; I can't tell you the use he is just now," replied Craven. "He is more good than any three Europeans, though you must not tell my assistants so. You see he will do what I want done my own way. If he disagrees with me he will say so; but his disagreement never comes out in his deeds. He was at Murdan yesterday, at Umb two days before, and has been riding along the



frontier criticizing the levies of the border chiefs. He has a soldier's eye for all military details, and, what is still more useful, he knows his own people so thoroughly, that they don't try to humbug him. I certainly owe it to him that the blockade has been so efficient as it has been up till now."

"If that is all the good of him, I can't help thinking you might give him to me, and yet the public service not be seriously the worse for it," said Colonel Stanley. "I want such a man badly to help in the recruiting, and to raise the tone among the younger men."

"You might suggest it to him," said Craven, smiling; "but I fancy he would prefer civil work, and looking after my blockade."

"As for that plan of yours of blockading the frontier," said Stanley, "it seems to me that it is a blunder. It is a very mild performance after all. We are doing no particular harm. It is quite an open question

whether our own villagers can get in their crops, and yet we are in avowed opposition, pledged to war unless the enemy gives in, and they don't look like it. We are at war, and not at war, and there the matter has been stewing now for a month or more, and will simmer quietly on for another two months before we dare send Europeans into the field; and Heaven knows what mischief may be cooked by that time."

"Less, at any rate, Stanley, than if we did nothing, and put up silently with that move of the Syuds to Sittana. Even now, with nothing done as you call it, there is no doubt that half the Otmanzai Jirgahs are ready to come in, and are only held back by the other half."

"I don't see your object in making the Jirgahs come in," said Stanley meditatively, "and perform an act of vassalage. They are not vassals. But that is a little matter: it certainly seems to me that you have been



over hasty in taking it up. You have wantonly set the pot on to stew, knowing that you cannot put a hand to it further for three mortal months. Are you perfectly sure that the want of a small excitement in this hot weather has not had something to do with it?"

"I doubt it, Stanley," said Craven, but knowing at heart his own difficulties with his impetuous subordinates, he spoke less strongly than he might have otherwise done. "I doubt it. I have too much at stake. We were in fifty ways driven into the thing, and are now keeping the fire, which we certainly did not kindle, as low as possible till you fellows can put it out."

"Then for any sake let us go at it at once," said Stanley, with warmth. "I will answer for it that the men will stand the Eusufzai country and the Mahabun better than the fair feverish hole we are in. Trust me that my metaphor of the pot put on to stew is nearer the truth than you think. Look at the mess when the column is

ready to start, which it will hardly be till November, and you will remember my words,—you will find it hot and strong and very unsavory; and I am no prophet if the whole quarrel does not look a very different matter by that time.”

“Well, if it is, it will be,” said Craven gravely; “but there is nothing for it. The Lahore government dread fever for the Europeans to that extent that all other considerations are put aside. Personally, I think they overrate the risk of fever.”

“Please God we have not a big butcher’s bill instead, that’s all.”

Craven did not answer, and Maxwell asked, “Has any surgeon gone with them to-night?”

“No,” answered Stanley; “that is, they have started without one, but are to pick up Woolett at Hussunkhail, where he went this afternoon to see some pet case—a fellow who was quite astonishingly nearly killed in a village fight some weeks ago, and whom

Woolett thinks he will get to live now, until the next fight at any rate."

"What a wonderfully nice fellow he is!" said Maxwell.

"Yes," added Craven. "How he ever finds time to get together all the knowledge he has is a marvel."

"It is true," answered Stanley. "I have been very fortunate to have two such men as Woolett and Linwood in a regiment at once. It is a thing to be thankful for, specially at the beginning of a war."

"I don't see that Linwood is anything so extraordinary," said Craven. "He is a pleasant fellow, and a smart soldier, but there I should fancy the matter ended."

"No, it does not, by any means," replied Stanley. "He is a queer fellow in a good many ways: an odd mixture of qualities. I don't pretend to understand him myself, but to see how he strikes other people is instructive. The men of the regiment look on him as an embodiment of steadiness and

stolid courage. They would follow him anywhere, knowing that he will stick at nothing, and yet never run an unnecessary risk. They appreciate his riding, and like his handsome face, and look up to him with admiration, that is not without a dash of fear, for he has a grimmer side that turns up when you least expect it. My office work is all done steadily, and without fuss. He is about as reserved as he is pleasant, and manages to do all his work without anything one could call enthusiasm, and does it all well. And then I find outsiders always look on him as a pleasant trifler, and a man who thinks overmuch of himself."

Ida had listened with eager interest to this, but did not care to speak.

Maxwell was watching her, and said, "I daresay he is a paragon of adjutants, but I doubt your young men without enthusiasm and I should suspect him of caring very little for any one but himself, though he has been a pleasant boy all his life."

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"India is a bad place in which to make that sort of judgment of any one," said Stanley thoughtfully. "Every man of us, all the unmarried ones I mean, are strangers in a land of strangers; the life may gradually make a man selfish, but no one knows what hard lines the process may have been to him."

"May be, but I don't believe your pearl of adjutants has suffered much," said Maxwell, still bent on stating what he believed to be a truth about Hugh in Ida's presence.

"I think you misunderstand the boy altogether," Stanley continued warmly. "He was a much simpler, brighter fellow once, but when we were in China something seemed to come over him; he got silent and moody, and out of heart; was careless about everything, and neglected his duty so shamefully that I should have taken very serious notice of it if Woolett, who knew him better than any one, had not told me that he was dreadfully cut up about

something, and begged me to have patience for a little. It appeared he had been engaged to a girl whom he had known from childhood, and that she had married some one else without so much as a word to him. It was an awful blow to him; he went about as miserable as a cat, and as useless for weeks. I really did not know what to do with him, when my adjutant, Henley, got sick, and there was no other man with a better claim, so I tried a bold stroke. Instead of making a work about it, which would have probably resulted in his leaving the regiment, and so destroying his prospects, I made Linwood take the appointment provisionally, told him that I thought he could work well if he tried, and whether he tried or not he has done it. I don't know how I should get on without him now, yet he is not the same man he was before. You ladies," he added, turning to Ida, "should be careful. It is risky work playing with men's lives."

Ida, who was as pale as a ghost, was thankful for the uncertain light that prevented him seeing her well. She looked simply frightened, and made no answer.

"Poor fellow!" said Maxwell, coming to the rescue. "It seemed hard on him, but there may be a second side to the story; at any rate it set Hugh to work, and you and the regiment should be thankful."

"It seemed more wantonness than mischief," Stanley answered. "The girl must have been absurdly young, from what I heard, both for wooing and marrying;" and as he spoke, his eye fell upon Ida, and it struck him that she looked very odd,—like a child that was being scolded. What did it mean?

This was the climax to Ida. All the time that Colonel Stanley had been speaking of Hugh, she had felt excited and frightened, afraid of betraying her interest, and yet eagerly drinking in every word, and longing for the time when alone by herself she could

think it all over and understand it. Much of it was quite new to her. What had there been that any one could call an engagement? She certainly had not thought it so, and had hardly taken the episode seriously. She had not even had sufficient perception or conceit to think that her marriage could matter very much to Hugh at that distance, though she realized that the finding her at Pes-hawur married was probably disagreeable to him.

Her instincts were very keen in all that came under her eye, but the imagination that had so run riot in girlhood in sheer fantasies, had troubled itself very little with other peoples' feelings. That was a matter of which she had, and cared to have, no experience; and while making in her dreams elaborately perfect pictures, she had always with rare shrewdness known that they were not to be trusted as regarded other people. But now what had seemed to her a small thing, was held up



as a great one ; and when Stanley turned round on her, it took away her breath. She was sure he must know all the truth, and was reproaching her there, under Arthur's eyes, for her treachery. But Stanley was only thinking that perhaps it was rude to speak of any one as "absurdly young" in Mrs. Craven's presence, and was in doubt if she might not take offence.

Maxwell looked on with some amusement at this little game of cross purposes. He alone understood why Ida said nothing, and could say nothing, and could read the anxious scared look on her face. He felt sorry for her, but feared to stir the matter by any further talk.

At last Arthur, who had not been paying much attention to the conversation, noticed how white she looked, and said,—

"I think you are looking very tired, Ida. You had better go in."

The two gentlemen took the hint, and rose to go. Ida managed to say her fare-

wells quite bravely, and even to send kind messages to Mrs. Maxwell, wondering as she did so at the quaintness of outside things that have to go on under any pressure, and that often do more to relieve such pressure than it is easy to express.

"I say, Stanley," said Maxwell, as they passed the gate together, "you had better have left Linwood and his love affairs alone before Mrs. Craven."

"Why, what is it to her? All women like love stories."

"Except their own," returned the other.

"Good heavens! you don't mean that," exclaimed Stanley. "She did look very queer. What a fool I was!"

"You had no means of knowing," said Maxwell.

"No; of course I had not. I did not even know that Linwood had known her before he came here. Are you sure of the fact?"

"Yes, quite sure. They knew each other

as children, but I did not know it had been such a sore matter for Hugh. I thought it had been like any other boy and girl affair, and no bones broken."

"It was certainly more than that for him. He is a queer fellow, horridly tenacious no doubt; but how that girl was old enough for a love affair four or five years ago is a mystery to be explained," said Stanley, remembering her face, as she looked up frightened at him.

"She looked as old as she does now, I believe; but she was barely fourteen at the time. Of course Linwood had mainly himself to blame. The girl could not be expected to know what she was about, and if Hugh chose to look on it as an engagement, so much the worse for him."

"But did not she belong to any one? Of course she had no father," said Stanley.

"No; and her mother left her very much alone. Hence this muddle."

"At all events," said Colonel Stanley,

"it made a great mark on him. It is to be hoped he will have the sense to keep out of her way now."

They turned into Stanley's garden, had another cigar, and left the subject.

Ida had been discussed, but her secret was in the hands of gentlemen, and would go no further to enliven the small talk of the station.

"When they had gone, Ida gathered all her strength that she might tell Arthur the truth about this story of Hugh. She sat silent for a little, just in doubt what was the truth. They, or rather Colonel Stanley, seemed to know so much more about it than she did. At any rate it looked a much more serious matter than it had ever been before. She knew that she could never again look Arthur happily in the face till it was told. But how? and she sat pondering.

"Now, darling," he said, as he threw away the end of his cheroot, "you must go to bed; you are looking very tired."

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"I don't feel tired," she said, "and I want a talk with you, Arthur," with the feeling that "now it is begun, and I shall get through it."

But it was not to be. He rose, saying,—

"I have no time to talk to-night. It is nearly eleven, and I have some hours' writing to do."

"Write in the morning," she persisted. "I have something really to tell you," with a look of wistful anxiety that would have arrested him at any other time, but his mind had been for an hour past full of some special reports which had to be written.

"Not to-night, my child," he said. "No one knows what may turn up in the morning, and government must have reports." And he left her rather abruptly, without as much as a thought as to what she might want to tell him.

Ida did not know whether she felt most hurt or relieved, but she certainly did feel

somewhat exonerated that Arthur would not listen. If he would not, he would not, and there was an end of it for the present; and she went to bed, but not to sleep. Her thoughts were a perfect tumult: now Hugh at Bagnères, now the thought of all she had heard of him that night, and then how, when she had wanted to tell Arthur, she had been met by that everlasting duty,—a sort of dead wall for ever between them; and again, she pictured Hugh riding along in the moonlight, a perfect hero of romance. “What a fool I am!” she thought more than once; and the vision faded, but it was only to give place to sleeping dreams in which she found herself riding up a mountain road with Hugh and Arthur. Only she was Hugh’s wife, and Arthur was saying gravely to her, “Now, Mrs. Linwood, if you had enough gingerbread nuts for them, we might send a field force into the Chumla valley next week.” But before she could answer, her

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horse fell over the edge of the precipice, and in falling, she became conscious that she was riding in her night-gown, and her great hope was that they might go on and not look for her, which they did; or at any rate the dream passed away to some other wild jumble of Hugh, Arthur, horses, and gingerbread nuts.

## CHAPTER IV.

### *FOLLY AND WEARINESS.*

IDA woke the next morning from a succession of troubled dreams, with the feeling that very much had happened,—what was it? She did not know. Life, that had been for some time going amiss, had made even a bigger step now in the direction of what?—bad dreams or facts, she hardly knew. From her dream of wifely perfectness she had awaked first to the conviction that as the root of the matter was not there, not very much could be made of the rest. She was doomed to failure; and now came the knowledge of having, so her young conceit put it, spoilt another life, in the mere act that looked so much as if it had spoilt her own. It was odd, too, that Hugh should have thought so much of her when she had thought so very little of him; and not wholly



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painful was the sense of importance, of the power to make or mar, even though she had used it to so little purpose. She was still not quite a fool, but she was romantic in a way of her own; and Colonel Stanley's sketch of the man who had loved and suffered, and then grimly set to work with the spring out of his life, but any amount of force left in it, was just one to strike her imagination. And then it fitted so strangely with what she saw of Hugh, to her the simplest, brightest, kindest of mortals, so very comprehensible he seemed, that she had forbore to ask herself any questions about him. He was reserved to others who did not understand him, but to her so very natural. Was it that she was still very much to him? This supposition she put aside rapidly and at once, as false and improbable: firstly judging from Hugh's manner, and secondly from the exceeding inconvenience of the admission supposing it to be once made and acknowledged. So Hugh's attachment to her was

relegated to the past, and then, it must be confessed, she contemplated it with some satisfaction. Young, utterly inexperienced, romantic, having for her guidance flashes of shrewdness rather than real common sense, she rather cherished the notion of this strangest of heartbroken lovers,—strange she thought, that he now bore it so lightly, not that he had not been thoroughly heartbroken. The cherishing of the notion was very flattering to her conceit which had very little to feed on in her every-day life. The thought of admiration, worship, and the rest of it, got very firm hold of her, and she rather dwelt on it, being for the time nearer a fool than we have ever seen her. So as she galloped along the most lonely road she knew the next morning, she dreamt all this fairly out, with an odd second consciousness that she did not half believe it, and that though the charm of dreaming lay in doing it thoroughly, no life ever had been or could be a possibility for her, that was not one

way or other a struggle to do her duty. Then as she reached Mackeson's House on her way back to the station, she put it all safe out of her head, for she had firstly to meet her husband, and she might quite easily have to meet Mr. Linwood. Only somehow the intention of having any explanation with Arthur on the subject of Hugh was put away with the rest.

It chanced, too, that they were not alone, for one of Arthur's assistant commissioners had come in with him, the Mr. Johnson we have before referred to, a small, dark, and ugly, but capable specimen of the competitive system. Ida poured out tea, and talked a little.

"No tidings of the detachment?" said Johnson, as Arthur came back from seeing some native official.

"No; none so far, but I am afraid they have missed the marauders," said Craven. I suspect that Saadut Khan would have been back by this time if there had been anything worth telling."

"What a sell for Linwood!" said Johnson, who did not much like the dandy soldier about whom people were disposed to make a fuss.

"We shall know by midday," said Arthur.

"Will the detachment return at once?" asked Ida.

"No; the men will be housed in a serai at Hussunkhail for the day. They will come back at night."

Ida felt glad that she should not have to see Hugh till she had had time to forget all that nonsense.

So the day went on as other days. About ten o'clock a chuprassee brought a note from Arthur, saying,—

"The Mir says that the Momunds had made off before they got there; it is supposed they had information. At any rate Linwood saved Abdul Surra.—A. C."

The little note touched Ida. Arthur had thought of her, and sent her news he knew she would care to have. It was like him. He

did not worship her, he was even at times a keen critic, but at any rate he was perfectly loyal; while she—she had been letting her mind be filled with all sorts of rubbish,—she had been equally disloyal and thoughtless.

She felt thoroughly dissatisfied, and her resolve to tell it all to Arthur came back very strongly. She felt frightened at the thought. What would he think? He would be just at any rate; and justice, from the husband point of view, seemed very alarming to her. But at rate it must be done; that was quite clear. If, therefore, the day had ended as other days, it is very probable our story would never have been told; but instead of Arthur's remaining at work till nearly dinner time, he came in hastily about four o'clock with a telegram in his hand.

She got up, "Arthur, what is it? Is anything wrong?"

"Only so much," he said, "that they want me at Murree for a few days, to consult with

the officials up there. I must be off by the mail cart at six. Will you get me something to eat, and send Hunaman to pack my clothes. I suppose they will want a lot of papers, and I must look them out," and he went to his office room.

Ida made herself very busy, summoned the khansamah, and arranged the matter of food, looked out of her husband's wardrobe summer and winter clothes; and leaving Hunaman to squeeze them into a tiny portmanteau as best they would go, she went to the office-room, and knelt down at the table beside Arthur.

"Shall you be away long, Arthur?" she said.

"No, darling; I fancy not, but there is no saying. I never can be sure of being three days in one place just now. I wish you were at Murree; I don't like to leave you here alone."

"Why?" she said, wanting some word of kindness from him.

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"No need to say why. It is hot and dismal, and you look ill," he answered; "and you have no one to speak to."

"I don't seem to care for people, Arthur," she said rather wearily. "I think there are rather too many of them. I am best here, for you are sure to be back soon."

"It is likely, unless the lieutenant-governor thinks I should watch the frontier with my own eyes, instead of Saadut's, which he may any day, and then I should have to do my work as best I could out in camp in Eusufzai. You had better let me find you a house at Murree for the rest of the season."

"No, please, Arthur. I like this so much best."

"You know nothing of that," he said.

It was difficult for her to explain what made her so anxious to stay; she hardly knew herself, but she felt once up at Murree, she would be still farther from common sense and her duty. Nothing helped her but Arthur's presence, and that was the one

thing she could not have; but it was more hopeless at Murree, notwithstanding this present visit, than here.

"If they send you into camp, could I not come too?" she said.

"Why, it would kill you, child."

"I don't think so. I don't believe heat would kill me. You may have to stand it."

"I would rather not try experiments on you, Ida," he said; but still the thought pleased him, that his little incomprehensible child of a wife should wish to join him in the hardships of his present life; and he went on, "We will see when the time comes. You think you would like it?"

"Yes," she answered eagerly; "it would be real help and pleasure to me; and I want help, Arthur. I am a fool many ways. I want to be more with you, and to—I hardly know what; but could not our lives work more together?"

A puzzling question for a man up to the eyes in official business. What possible



answer could he make? He was touched by her manner, felt that this was a real cry from a passionate soul under some sort of need, and he loved her dearly. He could not answer directly, what was so much Hebrew to him, but he put his arm round her and drew her to him, and said,—

“Well, darling, I hardly understand you. Maybe our married life has not been all we hoped it was to be, I don’t see how or why, but something has been lacking; what is it?”

Ida’s heart sank; she knew so well what was lacking. She kissed him very quietly, but he felt her lips tremble, and then she rested her head on the table, and wondered if she could not then speak of all that was in her mind, but there was no time. The *khan-samah* announced that the traveller’s meal was served. No more could be said. Arthur ate his dinner, or made believe to do so, but he would have given much to have been able to see what it was that had stirred Ida so

deeply. At six precisely, the little scarlet dog-cart, sacred to mails all over the north-west of India, pulled up, making frightful noises with a cracked bugle, at the commissioner's gate. Saadut Khan, with a very brigand looking collection of arms and wraps, was hanging on to the back seat. Arthur's wraps were thrown in, he sprang to his seat, and in a moment they were speeding along at a rattling pace, in the most entirely uncomfortable and the most expeditious of conveyances.

As he drove along the road in the clear, cool night, the thought of Ida's outburst came back to him. It was not the time for guessing riddles, and under more favourable circumstances he had failed to make out what was wanting in his fair young wife; but he did what was more like the man, and more to the purpose, very earnestly asked himself in what he had failed. It was not love or good will, but somehow he had not succeeded. What was it? He had blamed her at times of late, and in that he had been wrong. Not that

she was blameless, but that he had blundered in his notion of her faults.

"My poor little darling!" at last he thought. "God grant we may make more of it in the future."

When he had gone, Ida went back to the drawing-room. It was cool enough after the scorching air in the verandah, but the air was thick, heavy, and choked her. She threw all the doors open, and lay on a sofa looking out to the rockery with its acacias. It was no longer as pretty as it had been in April. There had not been much rain that season, and all the green things were very dusty, the lilac flowers were gone, and the pods on the sirus trees were reaching an ugly stage. To Ida it seemed the very picture of desolation. The feeling of desolation in a place she had grown to like was the more painful, that she remembered now so much time there, when there was no visible cloud over her life, when she had believed herself to be just girl and woman like others,

only a little happier ; but now what did this all mean, and how would it end ? Then came back Arthur's words : what had he meant ? He had been tender, very tender ; she had longed for loving words, not that she loved him, but that she was lonely, and they had come, but with such a note of sadness in them, that she had felt guilty, and more hopeless than ever.

No doubt something had been lacking ; he had felt it too, and had gone away from her with words of disappointment on his lips, the acknowledgment that their married life was a failure. Then the question came, well if it was, whose was the fault ? Hers for marrying without love ? In a measure, yes ; in a still greater measure, no. For this strange unaccountable breath, this spirit in the thing, that made happiness and meant real union, had never entered into her thoughts about marriage ; no one had ever told her it should do so. The whole thing had been so utterly beyond her at the time of

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Arthur's wooing, that in no respect could she hold herself of two years back responsible for her present trouble. Was the fault then Arthur's, for asking her? Doubly no, because he had loved her then, and still to his sorrow loved her, and thus had in a way the worst of it. But then he had so much else to do that it mattered less; and she—she had to lead an empty hopeless life, and she must go on so for the indefinite time, that stood between now and death. To persuade herself, that Arthur had the best of it was easy enough on the surface, but deeper down lay the conviction that worse pain must come to him later if he did not in time get not to care; for she could hardly be sure to act well all her life. And what if this strange thing came to her after all, and she loved some one else, not Arthur? Why should she not? It was a thing that seemed to happen or not happen in one's life, independent of wish or will. If wish or will could have done it, she would have been long ere this the best and

most loving of wives. What was right and who was wrong, in such a case? Lying and acting were surely none the less wrong for being done in a good cause; lies would work their own undoing in any case. But then she was not just a woman, a human being unattached; she was a wife, and must take things as they stood. And then the question came, what did wifeness really mean? Was there anything real in the outer tie if the heart was not in it? Yes; there clearly was much. She had given her whole life, all she was, and all she hoped to be, to Arthur. A very bad bargain he had got of it, but still it was just as much a fact for them both. He had got her and would have to put up with the good and bad of her for life. Life—what was life? All the existence, at any rate, of which we know. Then all the hopes of future life are involved in what we are and do in this: and she sighed, as she could see no way of doing anything with this, and grew selfish again.

Arthur at any rate, she said to herself bitterly, had no lack of things to do; his career, his work, his friends,—he had employment, ambition, fellowship. His life was so full, why could he not have been content, without swallowing up her poor little life? It would surely have been so little to him one way or other; but to her, there she was in this *impasse*, and must make the best of it, or get out of it. Out of it?—there was but one way—to die; and with this climate to help, there was no saying. “Life is after all what one can do with it, and I can do nothing with it.” And she thought quietly but hopefully of the possible getting out of it into a region where one does not make mistakes. The thought of death fixed itself, and seemed to help her, and to be the only hope she could see. She did not think of suicide, but there came something very like a wish that the fever that laid so many down, might seize her, and then if she said not much about it, not much would be done to make it get

better, and there would be an end of all. It would be really best for Arthur, and was quite the only thing for herself.

The next morning brought a letter from Mary Maxwell, so oddly out of tune with these thoughts of hers that we had better give it in full.

“NUTWOOD LODGE, MURREE,

“*August 26th, 1863.*

“MY DEAREST IDA,—

“What are you doing down there? I have not had a line from you since I left. Surely you have not much to do, and I—a hard-worked mother of a family—have written twice to you.

“I am not in love with this place; indeed, like it no better than when I first came; but still time passes, and I am busy. The boy is well, gets bright cheeks, and vigorous ways; eats, sleeps, plays, and wears clothes, and as far as he is concerned I have the satisfaction of a good conscience. He is a good



deal with me, I find it wholesome to keep him in sight, to save me from fretting that I am up here, shelved as it were, just at the time I might be some good below.

“I have a good deal to do for my barrack friends. Several of them are down at Nund Kote, about five miles away, and of course all the work has to pass through my hands. My jampanis lives are made a burden to them, trotting to and fro with parcels. I cut out a good deal for them myself, as there are only the more incapable ones here, and in a place with European shops things need to be very good to stand the competition. However, we have between us achieved some muslin pinafores, foolish things, but which sell foolishly, and some quilted silk hoods, and hats, which the mammas of the place buy in numbers. Then I do society to some extent, more than I ever cared to do at Peshawur; not that I like it, but just because I feel restless. I don't find many people I like: the women are a lazy set, and can talk

nothing but babies and servants; and the men,—well, do you know, I think they are worse, they cannot even talk babies and servants, and stick to their neighbours, or give one a sort of mild echo of the richer scandals of Simla. It is very provoking, and I feel rather tempted to do something wild if only to give them matter for talk nearer home. I don't care who the chief asks to his parties or does not, and why.

“What about the frontier? You are at the head-quarters of information. Here the loafing men know nothing, and the officials will say nothing. By the way, it will please you to hear that at a dinner at the ——'s yesterday, Mr. K. spoke most warmly of Colonel Craven, said that his presence in the valley now was such a comfort to every one, that there was not another man in India so fit for the crisis; but I could get no information of what is to be done. A force must go, but when? and what? and will they take X? If you can get any details

out of your husband, send them to me; and I will keep my intelligence to myself. How is Harry looking? He writes me dutifully every day, but I can't get him to report on his health and personal appearance. See him soon, and send me word, for I am wearying for an outside opinion of him. It chafes me horribly to be stuck up here at this worst time of the whole year, never knowing when he may be down with fever in that delightful valley of yours. You are a lucky woman, Ida, to be able to stay with your husband. Let me hear soon. Good-night, dear.

“Your ever affectionate friend,

“MARY H. MAXWELL.”

The letter was a pleasant one, but it brought very little comfort to Ida. Mary was one of the happy people who had work in the world to do; and what was more, she had not fallen by accident into her place in life, but was there by deliberate choice, and so belonged to it and

had a right to live; while she had only a claim on the world for a grave and some kindly regrets, and there would be an end of it.

Time passed slowly on, and Arthur did not return. It was strange how in these solitary days—influenced more than she would have acknowledged by the wearing summer heats—the thought grew on her that she had been concerned in wrong doing, that she had done definite mischief in two men's lives, and that death was coming to set it all straight. That she had done it innocently was neither here nor there to the fact, but it made the thought of the undoing by the end of her life more tolerable. It grew to be still more a conviction that death was coming than a hope that it would come; but yet the thought was a pleasant one, and she wondered quietly through sleepless nights and restless, fevered days, if this was not the beginning of the end.

Days and nights passed in this way.

Excepting Colonel Stanley, Henry Maxwell, and Hugh, Ida saw no one, and the two former but rarely. Maxwell had dined with her once or twice; Stanley had come in one morning when Hugh was there, and had behaved, so Ida thought, very strangely, by taking Hugh down, and generally setting him right, even to snubbing; and this, considering the superlatively good opinion that he had given of Hugh, was certainly odd.

There were not any ladies in the place that she knew well, and she had no mind for men acquaintance, so practically Hugh Linwood was Ida's only companion through these September weeks, and the only influence that kept her from going farther lengths than she did in the direction of morbid nervousness.

But she did go quite far enough. Hugh did not know what to make of her, she looked so white and ill, and was so quiet and unnaturally calm. She was always

glad to see him,—really clung to him as the only friendly human creature within her reach, though she had not spirit or energy to talk much to him.

With Stanley's story on her mind, she was careful to make no allusion to the past; but as there would soon be an end to all earthly things, and to him she had done most wrong, she might at least be kind, she thought, to him.

What did Linwood think? Not much; but he felt a good deal. There he was, the only human being the poor girl had to speak to, and told himself that he must be much at her house for simple charity's sake, and was driven nearly wild by what he saw, or thought he saw, there. He fancied Ida fretting for her husband, and did not in his thoughts spare "that fellow Craven enjoying himself up in the hills, and letting his young wife fret herself ill in this wretched climate." It was as well some one cared for her; and he

much cherished the notion that he was of much value to her to save her from the worst consequences of her husband's neglect. Men do fancy odd things when they are on the search for excuses to please themselves. He did not, of course, fathom her real state of mind, but the chance glimpses he got of it puzzled and exasperated him not a little.

One morning, it was soon after Stanley had seemed to snub him for being there, and he had of course had a fresh access of charity and dutifulness on the subject, he found her looking more worn and hopeless than usual, and he said—

"Ida," they had fallen somehow into Hugh and Ida, "you are looking very ill."

"Am I really," she said quite coolly.

"You don't seem to mind looking ill."

"No; why should I?" she answered.

This was not quite easy to answer, but he made a shot at a common-place.

"It is your duty to take care of yourself."

"Is it?" she said, very wearily this time.

"What do you mean, Ida?" he said, looking at her steadily. What could he say that would not be an allusion to "that fellow Craven"? "You look ill and worn, and I believe you don't care. What does it mean? Something is wrong. What is it?" And he looked at her with such an expression of real trouble on his face as to convince her more than before that her duty to him was to get out of it all.

"Well, Hugh," she said quite quietly—it seemed as natural to speak frankly to him as it was difficult to do so to Arthur,—“it means nothing very wonderful. I think sometimes that I shall really die, I seem so terribly weary and tired; and perhaps it would be best.”

"Ida, you should not talk like that; it is wrong, wicked. Are you not happy?"

"Happy! Yes; I suppose so. But somehow the thought of death fascinates me; I am sure it would be best."



She said this so earnestly, with a dreamy, far-away look in her eyes, that Hugh felt fairly frightened. It meant, of course, that she was miserable, and that Arthur Craven was a brute, but there was no saying it to her; and above all there came a real fear that words like these might be heard by the powers beyond, and so work their own fulfilment.

Was there nothing to be done? Was there no way out of it? Was she just to fade away out of the world for want of love and care, when he would give his life for her gladly? But then his life would be no good to her. He could neither live for her nor die for her.

He left her hastily, with an uncertain look about his eyes, moved beyond the strength of his manhood; and when his composure returned, it was sadly and bitterly that he went about his day's work. Why had fate ever thrown them together, separated them, and now again brought him

to look on while her heart was being broken. Truly life was unbearable;— but yet he had absolutely no wish to leave it, and Ida's words seemed to him both wicked and unnatural.

## CHAPTER V.

### *WOOLETT'S OPINION.*

COLONEL CRAVEN wrote frequently to his wife, but there seemed very little chance of his getting back to the Peshawur valley now that the most important work was out of it. September was spent by him in moving about from one point to another, near the frontier. He had been to Umb; he had been to all the posts; he had inspected all the places that were likely to be of military importance in the coming struggle; he had had much consultation with the men best acquainted with the sort of work on hand, of whom Col. Wylde was to be found at Hoti-Muridan, and General Sir Nevill Chamberlain, who was to have command of the force, had come to join them there. As September wore on, every hope that there had ever been that the affair might be

peaceably settled was at an end. All were convinced of the necessity of war, and all were eager for it. But there was much to be decided as to the composition of the force to be sent, and the plan of the work it was to do. Though the Syuds had roused our wrath by descending to a point on the southern slope of the Mahabun very close to our frontier; yet it was considered that it would not be enough merely to eject them from it. This we had done only five years before, and it had now to be done again; so it was clear that the intruders must be more effectually chastised this time, and that the stronghold of Mulka on the northern slope of the mountain, must be destroyed, and by so doing, we hoped to put an end once for all to the hotbed of sedition and mischief that had too long remained to work ill to us, and to be a real source of danger at any moment of trouble.

The great question was, how to get at

Mulka. To go straight up and over the crest of the mountain was a possible but not by any means an attractive military manœuvre. So it seemed we must go round the base of the hill, and up one of the valleys to the side of it. Next came the question how many or how few men it would be safe to send there. Many of the frontier soldiers, men of the type of our best Indian warriors of long ago, were for a small force well equipped, but cumbered by as few of the appliances of European warfare as possible. The officer on whom the responsibility was to fall, asked for 5000 men, to the scorn of the more impatient spirits, who made sure that with one thousand all the petty strongholds of the Mahabun might be crushed in a week.

Quite as an afterthought came the question of who, and how many, the defenders of the said strongholds might be, and how far our standing on their ground would be held as a *casus belli* by the moun-

tain tribes not immediately concerned in the quarrel. Much was suggested in the way of elaborate proclamations, the wording of which was to be of so essentially soothing and pacificatory a nature, as to impress all readers with our good intentions. Then came a shrewd suggestion emanating from Saadut Khan, to the effect, that when English troops were across the border, not many of these fierce fighting men were likely to waste much time in reading proclamations. The officer in command of the Guides brought a new name into the discussion, that of the Bonairs; and asked how many of them there were, and if, as was now proposed, the force rounded the western spurs of the mountain, and, entering the Chumla valley, skirted Bonair territory, we might not have to take into account the temper, manners, and peculiarities of its people.

On this point information was not easily forthcoming. That there were a good many

of them, and that they were quite as brave and fond of fighting as any better known people, was taken for granted. A small religious difference was supposed to make it unlikely that they would side with the Sittana fanatics, unless these latter could make peace with the great religious magnate of these wilds, the Akhund of Swat, in which case we might have a very heavy handful to deal with.

In the midst of the discussion it became known that the highest military authority in India was for delaying the expedition till the spring; but that only made the politicals on the spot the more eager to have their plans in working shape at once, for none of them liked the thought of living through another six months with this festering mischief still hot under their hands.

With all this and much more to be argued, discussed, and reported on, no wonder that Arthur Craven did not see his way to summon his wife to join him.

The tone of her letters struck him: she seemed sad, she wrote little, and always about outside matters, never alluding to herself; but she was certainly out of health, or heart, or something; and for the time it vexed him, but soon enough the impressions passed away. There were too many facts stirring round him for there to be much room for impressions, or for the unravelling of unexplained vague troubles such as hers.

Matters went no better with our heroine, she seemed to become more nervously strained and eerie every day; she slept but little, and when she did sleep, seemed to live, move, act, and suffer enough in dreams to make the action of years of life; and often at the latter part of the day there came a feverish hour or two that was to her a confirmation of her fancies. It proved to her satisfaction that the doom was on her, that it was only a question of time and of not being interfered with, and in a little while she



would be low enough for the real marsh fever of the place to fasten on her for good.

Hugh was in great distress about her. He could see she was looking more weary every day, but could think of nothing to help her. One morning he determined that Woolett should see her at any rate, and, to Ida's surprise, appeared at chota hazri, accompanied by him, making some excuse about having met him, and fatigue, and so on. Ida received him, as she did everything just then, quite quietly, wondering a little what made Hugh break their *tête-à-tête*. She could not be worried to talk much to him, though she liked him; and the two young men left early, and as they walked home together Hugh said,—

“Does not Mrs. Craven look ill?”

“Yes, I suppose so,” answered Woolett; “white and thin at all events.”

“She is terribly changed this last few weeks,” Hugh went on, thinking that

Woolett was making far too little of it. "Is there nothing to be done for her?"

"My dear fellow, you don't want me to doctor her against her will. If she consults me, well and good; but as it is, I really know nothing about her health."

"Just like you doctors!" exclaimed Hugh, impatiently. "Stick to etiquette, and the rest of it, with a girl like that dying before your eyes."

"Dying! I don't think she is dying," returned the other coolly. "She is excitable and nervous, and the climate is an exhausting one; but she has a stronger constitution than either you or I."

"Do you really think, then," said Hugh, greatly relieved, for he had much faith in his friend's opinion, "that she will live through it?"

"I can see no possible reason why she should not live," Woolett went on more forcibly. "I dare say it is dismal for her in that big house by herself all day long, and

she seems a listless idle sort of woman. She is just bored, but she won't die of it. But, Hugh, now we are on the subject, it won't do any good your going and consoling her. It is playing with edge tools, old fellow; and though of course you mean nothing but kindness, no woman's name is safe in these scandalous holes of stations."

"No one has said a word against her," said Hugh, between inquiry and defiance.

"I have heard none, but that proves nothing," answered his friend. "You can do no good, and you may do some harm. If she does find it slow without her husband, so much the worse; but you cannot mend the matter, and will only burn your fingers if you try."

"I think, Woolett, you are talking of what you don't understand," said Hugh, rather sulkily.


"It is no use getting savage with me, Hugh; not a bit. You ask me to Mrs. Craven's coffee-shop because you want me

to look at her professionally, and now you are going to make a fuss because I have used my eyes in the direction of simple common sense. She is just very excitable, and too much alone,—nothing more; but for heaven's sake, Hugh, don't you attempt to do company for her. No one knows where it may end; and the only possible duty you have to the girl is to leave her alone."

"You make too much of it," said Hugh. "If I did, I don't believe she would speak to a soul from one week's end to another."

"Well, if she did not, she would get so bored that she would go to her husband or to the hills. A woman in the plains by herself is a nonentity, and if she wants some man, not her husband, to look after her, she is definitely injurious to society."

Hugh made no answer. It was no use getting savage with Woolett, as he had said. With all his sharp speech, Hugh knew that he was very true to himself, and very much to be trusted on a medical opinion.



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So he felt more hopeful for Ida, which was a great relief to him; but he could not lose the thought of her hopelessness and loneliness, though he determined, cost him what it might, that he would be less with her as soon as Craven returned.

With this determination, feeling as he did that her presence was the one thing he cared for, he thought himself excessively good and high-minded, and believed he was soaring above the base level of worldly considerations, and the coarse standards of Indian society, in being equally determined to look after her in her present need.

So Woolett's warning had the effect of many such warnings, of defeating its own end. Hugh went more regularly than ever to Ida's chota hazri (he was very rarely with her at any other time), and tried all he could by taking her news of the outside world, details of anything fresh or amusing that turned up in his life; was always useful, always friendly, never intrusive,

striving his best to help her through the dismal lonely weeks.

The effect of this was to fill all of Ida's thoughts that were not devoted to herself, and her fixed idea of passing away from the life of which she could make nothing, with Hugh, making him for the time the most prominent feature in her daily life.

Any thought of conventional propriety was swept away by this fixed idea of hers. She no longer belonged to the ordinary world or the common standards. Real judgments, not the guesses of outsiders, were all she had to do with; and her conscience, which was sorely weighted with the past, had no shadow of misgiving of the present. It was only for a time; all was drawing fast to its end, and she thought quietly of the tender regret she would leave behind her in the hearts of her friends, Arthur still the foremost of them, when she had at last left the world that had no real place for her. Thus slowly lagging

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days and restless nights brought Ida to the last week of September, not ill in body, but utterly weary, limp, flat, and spiritless; not noting much the flight of time, so greatly had this odd nervous state of hers mastered her natural self. It had clean abolished her will for the time; it had weakened her critical side, which was always in health a very strong one. There was no hope of any criticism of her own coming to the rescue, and there was no saying how long it might be before any outside influences came to blow on her a fresh breath from the real world.

One morning, however, they (we speak of course of Hugh and Ida) had gone deeper down than usual to the roots of things, criticising the opinions they were supposed to hold, and trying to discover what was really left to them as a faith. Ida taking her part in the discussion quite simply, as one to whom what was beyond the world was the main thing that mattered,

but speaking to Hugh of motives of action, as still his business; he, catching from her her strange unreal conviction, felt as if she was really on the threshold of another life, and he about to be left more utterly alone than ever.

“Well, Hugh,” she was saying, “life must be a fight, and a sad one. I suspect every one sees it sooner or later, and but for the end of it I don’t see how one would have courage to live on from day to day, specially we idle women-folk. You happy ones who have work to do, can wait, be thankful, and do it.”

Hugh was in despair at this, and it is doubtful if he might not have made a reply inconsistent with his part of friendly guardian, when Hunaman announced that Saadut Khan wished to pay his respects to the Mem Sahib.

It would not have been easy to find any one more utterly out of tune with them both than Arthur Craven’s Mussulman friend.



With Hugh, on the soldier man-among-men side, Saadut was rather a favourite. The two men had got on well together on their night ride some weeks back, and each had thought well of the other; but to Hugh, as an affectionate sympathetic mortal, deeply moved, and really anxious, Saadut was very greatly out of place; while the fact of his being an Asiatic and Craven's devoted friend was a guarantee for misunderstanding, if Saadut thought at all on his relations to his friend's wife.

To Ida, Saadut Khan seemed to embody all that she most suffered from, and dreaded in Arthur's criticism. She had felt all this summer that the Patan was in some sort a rival, and it was in a real degree the same characteristics that gave to Arthur his ready comprehension of Eastern life, and his power over Asiatics, that made him miss the mark in his estimation of his wife, whose independence, truthfulness, and strength of purpose were so strangely matched with

morbid consciousness and a wild imagination.

Saadut Khan was only on a flying visit to Peshawur. He had come from Attock, and was to return that day to some region north-east of Murdan, where Colonel Craven happened to be at the time. He did not stay long. He told them of Colonel Craven's movements and doings, spoke with much evident interest and anxiety of him, and then relapsed into Asiatic conventionalities, and took his leave. Except when speaking of Arthur, Saadut's manner was more grave and impassive, and his words more conventional than even his wont; and though she could read nothing in his still brown face and deep-set coal black eyes, Ida felt as if a breath from another world had blown on her, and a long forgotten standard had reappeared, whose judgments, though false, were not easily refutable. It took her out of her strange narrow selfish present into the region of reality and other people;

and what was still more painful, more of a moral cold bath, it brought down upon her husband's judgments and her husband's claims, without the help that his personal presence always brought, as that of a man who, though not understanding her, at least loved her dearly.

Hugh left soon, dimly aware that a breath of reality had somehow blown between them, and that things could hardly again be as they had been. Ida spent the morning in a state of acute consciousness, that contrasted strangely with her mood of quiet conviction and waiting for the end. She certainly felt very much alive, and if it was life not death before her, she had a new puzzle and difficulty added to all the rest,—the place that Hugh Linwood had come to occupy in her thoughts.

However, before midday she had fretted herself into an actual attack of fever. Cold and hot by turns, with alternations of excessive depression; when the bodily shiver-

ing repeated itself within, in shrinking, fear, and vacancy; and exaltation, the hot fit bringing a kind of delirium, which involved great excitement, vague floating thoughts that she could not catch, but which were filled with Arthur, Hugh, and the coming parting from them both. This lasted for some hours, but by seven o'clock she was sitting in the verandah, wrapped in a large shawl, true to her determination of keeping quiet when the fever came, and also perhaps this the most of all, that she had a longing for some human presence. The loneliness seemed intolerable, and Hugh might come.

And he did come. Drawn by that indefinable magnetism that so constantly works its miracles without our recognising them. He loved her, she wanted him, and without any manner of thought about it, he came.

The sight of her shocked him. She had been pale and worn in the morning; now she looked ghastly. Her lips were

blue, and, with an uncertain quiver on them, were drawn tightly away from her teeth. Her eyes seemed to have no speculation in them, but they turned to him with a resting look, that was more expressive than many words.

"Ida, what is the matter?" was all he could say, though in his heart he thought, "Then she was right."

"I have had fever," she said, "all day."

"I think it is on you still," he answered. You should not be out here. What have you done for it? Let me send Woolett to you; he is better than that old owl, Brown."

"I don't want to see any one," she replied. I often get fever, and it goes away again."

"But not so badly as this. I can't in conscience let you neglect it," he insisted.

"Don't ask me to see a doctor, Hugh," she said pleadingly. "It will do no good, and make me miserable to be fussed about. For pity's sake, leave me alone."

"But something can be done for you; something must be done. Think of your husband, of your mother; think of your friends. It is really wrong to be so selfish as to wish to go away from us."

"It is just that I have thought of other people," she said quietly, "that I think the fever is good for me."

"Ida, Ida, you are just mad," he said, almost beside himself. "I cannot stand it."

The excitement of the young soldier and his evident grief touched Ida, though it seemed as nothing could excite her; but she set herself to work to comfort him.

"Wait a little, Hugh," she said. "You are over-estimating it all. I have had an attack of fever; well, other people have had the same, and have got over it. I still believe that it would be best if I were to go away out of the world; but I somehow feel less conviction that I shall go than I had this morning. I don't think there is much the matter with me. Saadut Khan's

appearance this morning seemed to upset me, set all my thoughts in a whirl. I think he had more to do with it than the climate."

"Why?" asked Hugh, somewhat relieved by her speech, but in his keen distress not understanding her very well. "Why?" He repeated his question, and she turned her head away, and looked out into the darkness of the garden.

Neither of them spoke for some moments, but had time to think of all that was involved in the question, and both knew that the true answer contained words that they dared not speak. In such passes the woman always speaks first.

"Hugh," she said slowly, commanding her voice with care, "I think you had better go now. I shall rest, and may be better to-morrow."

Hugh took the thin hand she held out to him. It was burning hot. He had been standing beside her all the time. He bent

over her, with his hand on the back of her chair.

"Ida, I will go, if you will take care of yourself, and try and live."

"Very well; but go," she said, trembling.

"Shall I send Woolett?"

"No; for any sake no. I shall be quite well, but please go."

He pressed his lips lightly on the hand he held, and left her. Of course when he was away the impression of how ill she was, and the risk of getting no advice, occurred to him more strongly than ever, and he would have gone back and reasoned with her, but for something very like the voice of duty that forbade him.

Woolett was right. They were playing with fearfully sharp edged tools. He knew now that it had been only simple manliness that had held him back in the presence of the sick suffering girl from uttering words that could never be recalled, and would have altered for ever their relations to each



other. He did not conceal from himself that his resolve, his sense of duty, had failed him as regarded her; and it had been one of the side winds that save human beings spite of themselves, an instinct of manliness, that had won for him still the power to be of any use to her.

It was not eight o'clock, but he could not go to mess. He felt he must be alone; so he went to his stable, saddled Rapid with his own hands, and rode fast out of the station.

It took all the dark hours of the night to cool him, and make him feel fit to meet any one or do anything. The fancy took him to go to the spot where he and Ida had been shot at. The stars were bright, Rapid was surefooted, and he was reckless; and by two o'clock he had made his pilgrimage, smoked a cigar on the stone where they had sat together, and returned to his bed, when there he slept well enough for three hours, and only Rapid and the

groom, who wondered at the travel-stained appearance of his charge, knew how he had managed to get the power for rest after the storm. Ida slept too, she had in another way conquered the tumult of feeling.

When Hugh left her, she went straight to her desk, and in a trembling hand wrote—

“DEAR ARTHUR,

“May I come to you? I want to very much. I have had a little fever.

“Yours ever,

“IDA CRAVEN.”

This served to calm her more than many doctors could have done. She knelt down and prayed for strength to do her duty, that whether it was life or death before her she might have no self, no will that was not one with the highest of all will; and then having, at least for the time, mastered herself, she slept peacefully the sleep of exhaustion.

## CHAPTER VI.

### *HE WON'T HAVE ME.*

THE next morning, when Hugh went to inquire at the Cravens' house, Hunaman gave him a note. It contained these lines :—

“DEAR HUGH,—

“I am better this morning, but feel weak, and think I had better rest.

“Yours truly,

“IDA CRAVEN.”

“She does not want to see me,” was his comment on this. “Perhaps she is right;” and he turned away really relieved to hear that she was better, and hoped that her account of herself was to be trusted. He left the house, and went back to the regimental lines. He had been before this

on the parade ground, but there were a few matters that demanded his presence. In particular, he wanted to see three recently arrived recruits, who promised to give some little trouble until they should get used to the restraints of their new life.

He found the colonel walking up and down behind the bells of arms, talking to Afzul Khan, the rissaldar we have before mentioned. He stopped to inquire of the latter in what row of huts the young men he was looking for were to be found, and then passed into a sort of lane between a double row of mud huts, with a single row of horses picketed down the centre. The horses were, many of them, really splendid creatures, and the sight of them was a very considerable pleasure. At the doors of the huts, or standing or sitting outside, were numbers of the troopers, looking even finer fellows in their undress than they did in uniform. They stood to attention and saluted as he passed, and the few

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words he spoke, responded to as they were eagerly and affectionately, showed that he had a very prominent place in the lives of these men round him. And they were much to him: he liked many of them personally, and he was very fond of his corps. Really there was, he had even then no mind to deny it, very much in his life irrespective of Ida Craven, or any womankind whatever.

The three young brother recruits interested him greatly when he found them. They were fine, well-grown, honest young fellows from the Kohat frontier, of whom the eldest might have been about twenty.

He found them chafing not a little at the necessary restraints of military life, and this more particularly that the rissaldar of the squadron, a Delhi Mohammadan, seemed to take a real delight in worrying them. The rissaldar, a certain Faiz-ullah Khan, had long been a trouble to Hugh. He had belonged to the regiment before 1857,

previous to the commencement of Stanley's reign, and before the recruiting had come to be so exclusively done along the north-west frontier, and down the Dera-jāt. He was a man of good family and some culture, hence his attaining to the position he held; it being an object with the authorities to encourage the employment of men of good family in the irregular corps; otherwise he had no particular claim to his high position, being a vapouring, empty-headed fellow, brave in the field, but not much use anywhere, and who had a special contempt for the rougher, abler frontier men. This he was at no pains to conceal; and indeed took a special pleasure in making the early months of the life of a recruit from the wilds as disagreeable as might be. He had a good deal in his power, and instead of bringing the difficulties of civilized life gently down upon these fresh caught mountaineers, he was rigid and exacting upon a number of little matters, which were to them

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equally novel and vexatious. And over and above personal vexations, our three young friends thoroughly detested him, with his curled moustache, and pussy-cat beard of a glowing greenish purple, and flowery talk in a language they could make nothing of, as an embodiment of all they most despised,—one of the effeminate Hinduised Mohammadans of the luxurious Mogul cities.

This was just the sort of case in which Hugh shone. His task was to make the young men see the need of all these details, to explain to them that their only chance of doing well lay in patiently attending to such, and that to resist would only place them more at the mercy of their tormentor.

Of course it had to be judiciously done, as the authority of Faiz-ullah must be upheld all the time. But it was done in such a way as to supply a motive; and when he left them he left the wish to please him stronger in the newly awakened

young minds, than even the sense of ill-usage.

He looked into Stanley's quarters on his way home, to speak about his new acquaintances.

"I wish we were rid of that Faiz-ullah," he said.

"So do I, heartily," answered Stanley. "But then he is just the man we are supposed to have a great many of."

"I am thankful it is a fallacy," said Hugh, "and wish we could get rid of him. He does his very best to disgust the young men who are of most use to us."

"It can't be helped. But if any promising young Hindustanis turn up, he shall have them, and we can transfer your friends to Afzul Khan's squadron. You might in the meanwhile keep them a little about you as orderlies; it will help them through. And, Linwood," he added, thinking as he spoke that there certainly was a look on his adjutant's face that he had seen before, "have you much to do to-day?"



“Not much, sir.”

“Then will you write the rough drafts in answer to these letters?” and Stanley handed over to Hugh a thick budget of officials. “The adjutant-general’s office has taken a spasmodic fit of activity, now that the rains are over at Simla, and want information on most subjects, specially the working of the new drill. Abuse it heartily; say it causes disaffection, and is a medium for the selection of the unfittest. It is only puppies, like Faiz-ullah, that can be got to bother themselves about it at all; and even they invariably blunder. If we can get rid of it, it will be a good thing.”

“All right. I will do my best,” said Hugh.

“And another thing,” added Colonel Stanley. “I want you to ride to a little fort on the left bank of the Cabul River; I think the place is called Ali Mohammad,—some eight or ten miles from Attock, as the crow flies. The commissioner wants me to send a

duffadar and five men there to commence a system of posts to connect his present headquarters with Attock. I wish you to go with them, and see that the place is wholesome, the guard-rooms water-tight, and make sure that it would stand an attack."

"I understand," answered Hugh, feeling very thankful for the chance of a little change of scene. "The distance is 25 or 30 miles from here, if not more. Shall the men do it on their own horses?"

"Well, no," said Stanley; "they must get there sharp, and be ready for work, so let them send on their own, and they can take six extra horses as far as Haishki, that is the point at which you cross the Cabul River on the road to Hoti Murdan, and they can be brought back next day. Start to-morrow night; and, stay, it would do those boys good to get out of Faiz-ullah's clutches for a little,—take them, and three seniors to look after them."

"All right, sir," said Hugh, and went back

to the lines to make arrangements, then home, and ordered Rapid's groom to take him with the rest of the spare horses that evening to the appointed half way spot; and then sat himself down to the paper-work, and wrote hard all day. Woolett wondered a little at his industry, but made no comment.

Thus the day passed with Hugh. He managed bravely enough to keep his thoughts from dwelling on Ida, conscious all the time that he was making an effort. When evening came, and the work was all done, the wish to know how she was, to see her, became very strong; but when he went out to the verandah facing the road, after dressing for the evening, he saw her carriage driving towards the city. "No use then," he said; but "at any rate she is better."

The something in Linwood's face that had struck him in the morning, made Colonel Stanley think of Mrs. Craven, and decide to go and see her, which he did at the proper calling time between twelve and two. He

did not like calls, but he did much like Arthur Craven, since the renewing of their old friendship this summer. It occurred to him to wonder what the young girl wife had found to do with herself all this time alone. She had certainly seen more of Linwood than was wise, but still in the little he had seen of her she had appeared to him a sufficiently unusual specimen of girl or woman, and one not to be judged at once by everybody's standard.

He went, and found her sitting at a table, with big books round her, looking very weary and tired of them. He, too, was struck with the manifest change in her looks since he had last seen her. They talked of generalities for a little, but she was so noticeably weak and weary, that he said at last,—

“You look as if you had had fever, Mrs. Craven?”

“Yes,” she answered; “a little, but nothing to trouble about.”

“You should be careful,” he said. “When fever begins it is very doubtful when it will

stop. I know the climate so well as to have a great respect for it.

"I think I am pretty careful," she answered, and let the subject drop; but she seemed to make very little of conversation at all. Colonel Stanley tried frontier, tried small talk in various forms, and found her equally civil and willing, but flat and spiritless on all points. "Something far wrong here," he thought; but as he rose to take leave, he said as a chance shot, "You should go and take care of your husband at Murdan; the change would do you good."

She flushed, and answered frankly (it was such a comfort to speak). "Yes, I want to very much; but I don't know yet whether Arthur will have me." And then she paled again so suddenly that Stanley could not help noting that she was very weak.

"You should go without leave," he said kindly, moved to real interest by the wistful childlike look on her face. "I am sure you want the change badly."

"I know I do," she said. And he went away, feeling that he did not understand the matter, but that the young wife was a good deal to be pitied, whatever the truth of it was.

He left some good behind him, for Ida was in a state of mind and body in which human presence is very valuable and helpful. She was ill enough to feel very desolate, when long alone. She was conscious that the world had come to a rather serious pass for her, but ever and again mental indolence and weariness took her back to the thought of death and rest as the probable end of it all. But Colonel Stanley belonged to the real world, and finding her ill noticed it, and suggested a reasonable plan of improvement. This breath of reality and common sense was very useful in changing the current of thought; and the fact that she was weak to-day from real illness, not living on in a fancied state of fading away, was also a gain for common sense.

She had a definite feeling of betterness,

and there came a natural desire to live and fight through it all, born perhaps of the fact that the difficulties were more real now; and she felt as anxious to get out of the station and go to Arthur, as she had previously been to remain. She had no clear notion what she would do when there, but go she must, it was an instinct of self-preservation, it would save her life, it would save her from—she knew not what—but the mere saving of life would not have roused in her such a feeling of necessity, absolute and imperative, as this deeper danger.

She was still unfamiliar with the thought, that she was running away from Hugh, but decided she would rather not see him till she had Arthur's answer; and ordered the carriage early in the evening, planning that her drive should last till mess time.

Her missive found Colonel Craven that same Thursday afternoon, just as he was leaving the Eusufzai village of Badakee, where he had been greatly vexed to hear

that many of the fighting men had disappeared. Their relatives were lamenting their absence, and were loud in their abuse of the men across the border, whom they accused of having carried them into captivity ; but it was just as probable, indeed rather more so, that the men had voluntarily crossed the frontier because they preferred to fight on the side of the faith. The word *Jehad* (holy war), had been very often heard of late, and any testimony that it was beginning to influence the people on the British side of the border, was a matter to make Craven feel very anxious. Ida's letter was on the top of a perfect bundle of official, semi-official, and private letters, brought to him by an orderly from Hoti Murdan.

He read it twice before he saw that it was at any rate a serious request, and must be answered as such ; and telling the orderly to wait and follow, he read the rest of the budget as he rode in the direction of another village, whose chief had to be



seen, and very civilly scolded before he could return to his camp some twelve miles off to dinner.

The official budget was weighty and important, and Ida's request ran some risk of being forgotten in the need to send off messages for the telegraph, whose nearest station was Murdan. However, something that Saadut said, he had joined his chief that morning, reminded him of it, and he wrote a hasty answer in pencil on a leaf of his notebook. This he gave to the orderly to take into Murdan with the messages for the telegraph in time for the night post to Peshawur, and went on with the work in hand. And though at night when he re-read the little note, it struck him that something serious must be the matter,—those simple words might include so much, and he felt compunctions, and wished greatly that he could see Ida,—yet he concluded, taking all things into consideration, he could have answered her request no other way.


Ida, in her anxiety to get his answer, had got up early on Friday morning, but felt too ill and too worried to ride, or do anything but wait for the post. She knew she should see Hugh that morning, but hoped that she would have her husband's letter, and could tell him she was going away for a little. She had made up her mind that surely Arthur would not refuse her request. She did not realise very well what he was doing, and looked on all this going about in Eusufzai and elsewhere, as a matter after all very like their cold weather district tours in which she always accompanied him.

At last the letter came in this form,—

“ HIGH ROAD, NEAR FUZUL-KOR.

“ Thursday, 5 p.m.

“ DEAR IDA,

“ I do not see that you can possibly come here. I have not even a head-quarters. I  
 three tents in different places. I never

know where I may be from one day to the next. I am sorry you are ill. You must really go to Murree for change. I shall be at Murdan to-morrow night (Friday), and will write to arrange everything for you. Be ready to start on Saturday evening, and go straight to Mrs. Maxwell's. She shall know when you are to be in Murree. Johnson will lay your dāk.

“Yours ever,

“A. C.

“P.S.—Get Mansell to attend you. He is the best doctor up there.”

Ida was terribly disappointed. To be sent to Murree in this off-hand fashion, just out of the way as a useless invalid, was the last thing she wanted.

She was not ill enough in body for a sanatorium, doctors, and that sort of fuss; but she was ill, sorely suffering in mind, and wanted to see Arthur, and to be helped by him. But now she was to go to Murree,

more out of his way than ever (for he must soon return to head-quarters she thought), to a region of utter emptiness, when she would to a certainty fill up her time by thinking of Hugh.

And as her thoughts got to this point, Hugh stood before her, looking very handsome, she noticed, in the semi-native dress of his regiment, dark blue and scarlet.

She did not get up, but held out her hand.

"You are better, I hope," he said.

"Yes, I suppose so," she answered. She would have given a good deal to be able to speak brightly, but the effort was beyond her. "I have had no more fever."

Hugh saw that there was something behind this, and wondered what, when his eye fell on the letter in her hand. The handwriting he knew was Craven's. That was it then. His instinct told him that Ida was not thinking of him, and was less embarrassed at meeting him than might have been after

that evening, and yet she had certainly avoided him yesterday. What was in the letter?

He felt jealous; bitterly jealous of the man who had all the right and the power, and made so little of it; while he, with all the love and the good will, was worse than no one.

"You have heard from Colonel Craven," he said.

"Yes; he wants me to go to Murree," she answered piteously.

"Perhaps it would do you good," he said; "you certainly need something. It won't do for you to be wearying here, and getting fever."

"But I shall hate Murree."

"Is there nothing else you could do that you would like better?" he said, knowing intuitively what she wanted, and feeling that he was approaching the root of the matter.

Ida could not get out at once of the habit of speaking naturally to him. Besides

she was grievously vexed and disappointed, and she said,—

“I wanted to go to Arthur, but he won’t have me.”

“Just like him!” said Hugh very savagely.

“Hugh,” she said slowly, her eyes opening very wide,—not the less indignant that she deserved it.

Hugh caught the tone of reproach, and was more riled than ever. Of course it was all right; he had no business to criticise Craven, and it was the proper thing for Ida to be indignant. But really, she had been left alone for weeks; it had been quite a toss up what was to be the end of it. She was ill and worn, dying for aught Craven knew or cared. He had been her only companion; had thought more, ay and more unselfishly of and for her, than he would have believed possible, and now he was to be looked down for a word of simple truth.

“I beg your pardon, Mrs. Craven,” he said.

Ida, who was nearly at her wits' end with vexation at Arthur's refusal, thought this was too much. Was she to have no friends?

"You are hard on me, too, Hugh," she said. The acknowledgment that Craven also was hard, softened him. She went on,—  
"But you know you must not blame Arthur to me."

"Of course I ought not," he said, unable to control his vexation; "but then it seems I know better than he does how ill you have been,—care more. Don't stop me, Ida, I know all about it: it is not wifely etiquette to allow any one to criticise a husband, but surely I am not just any one. I have known you longer than he has—I am sure know you better. Think of the old times; and let me be really your friend, even if I do speak the truth to you."

"But it must not be about my husband," and only when she had said it, did she see what sort of an admission she had made.

"But you judge Arthur unfairly, I am sure you do," she added, with far too much of a visible effort to convince herself, for her words not to inflame Hugh still farther.

He mastered himself in a measure, and said, "I judge him by myself; and though I don't doubt that in all else he is a much better man than I am, yet, Ida, I would not have left you alone here all this while."

"It is no use discussing that. He has a very great deal to do," she answered, feeling that this sort of talk would not do. "We had better drop the subject."

Hugh did not like to be thus silenced, and persisted, "But what—if as you say, he won't have you—are you going to do?" In his vexation he put this as disagreeably as he could; he wanted to feed his own irritation, not to spare her. His mental comment on wives, and the social humbug that makes a woman seek to represent herself in an attitude of adoration, irrespective of facts, was of the sharpest.



"I don't know," she answered shortly, "I shall probably stay where I am."

"It will kill you yet," he said.

"Well, if it does, we have discussed that sufficiently," she answered quietly, this time, feeling that she had not spirit for any more talk, and yet there was something that should be said.

Her tone, so like that he remembered so often this last few weeks, softened him entirely, and made him feel that he might still have a part to play, until Craven came to do his duty again.

"At any rate, Ida," he said, with an effort at his old natural manner, "we are friends."

"Yes, we are," she said slowly; "but——"

"But what?"

"I think, perhaps you had better not come here so often."

"Why?" he said; determined if it had come to this, that she should say some word of the truth.

"It is not easy to say; but surely you know, Hugh;" she looked up at him worried and puzzled; did he really not know why? "A married woman is best without men friends."

"Is that all, Ida?" he said, rising and standing near her, looking earnestly at her face.

"Yes, all, I trust," she said steadily, but not daring to meet his look.

"What does that trust mean?" he said getting reckless, with a wild passionate hope on his side, that she loved him, not the "fellow Craven," after all.

"I mean, Hugh," she said with an effort of courage, "that it has been very much help to me to have you for a friend. I have been ill, and selfish about it, and have not thought that it could not last."

"And can it not?" he said, still standing beside her, but so far back that she could not see his face.

"No," she answered; "because——"

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"Because I love you, Ida," he said in a low voice. "The truth is best told."

"No, Hugh, not that, not that. I did you wrong years ago, and have been very sorry; but that is past."

"Past,—how could it be past? I love you now, as I loved you years ago."

"But I was such a child then," she said.

"I, unfortunately, was a man," he answered bitterly, kneeling down to be nearer her, with his elbows resting on the back of a chair beside her.

"I am very sorry," was all she could say. As she looked at him pale with passion, but quite calm and sad, the thought passed through her mind of how different life would have been if she had been free to meet such love with love in return.

He rested his head for a moment on his arm to regain command of his voice.

"Ida, what is to be the end of this?"

"Nothing," she answered.

"Must I go?"

"Yes," she said, rising and putting her hand on his shoulder, "you must go; and we must not meet again for long. Be brave; I shall be sorry too."

"Take care, Ida. Don't drive me mad. Tell me you love Arthur Craven, and I will go."

"I love God and my duty, Hugh," she said steadily. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he said, rising to his feet as if he had been stunned. "If ever my love can be any good to you you will see me again. God bless you," and he was gone, and Ida was left standing alone.

Her whole heart seemed to go out after the man who loved her, and had left her for ever. He was so much to her, what would life be without him? She did not reason, but she felt as if he was everything. She could not let him go; at least, she must tell him that she loved him, and let him take that much comfort away with him. But he was gone, and she went to her room and threw

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herself on her bed, hiding her burning face with her bare white arms.

It is not a picture to dwell on. Love and sore suffering had come to her together : not flat weariness, nor even eerie fancy this, but acute pain ; and she writhed under it. She loved him, and he had gone for ever. She did not get beyond this. Her mind always sufficiently introspective, was quite powerless now. There was room for nothing but the sense of love and loss.

## CHAPTER VII.

### *GUEST NIGHT.*

Two hours might have passed this way, and yet Ida seemed no nearer mastering herself than she had been when she first left the verandah, and threw herself down to moan her heart out alone. At last her ayah, a handsome, sharp Mussulman woman, who had long had views of her own about her mistress's intimacy with the adjutant sahib of the cavalry, became impatient. It was high time her mistress should dress for the day, and let her go away to her dinner, or rather to the elaborate preparations for it, that took up so very much of the early part of the day. She had been about the house since early morning, and had been nearer the chota hazri verandah than either Hugh or Ida had known, and though she had been

neither instructed nor informed by their conversation, of which she could understand no word, yet she had noted the tone of earnestness; and after Hugh had left, and Ida had gone in, had passed through the verandah, and finding a letter on the ground by the chair in which her mistress had been sitting, had picked it up. It was Arthur's letter, that Ida had dropped and forgotten in her trouble; and the woman had since then been sitting in the front verandah, turning it round and over, looking at it all ways,—upside down being the one most preferred.

The khansamah, who was a man of education, had joined her for a little conversation in the verandah. He, on looking at the paper, pronounced it to be certainly the sahib's (meaning Colonel Craven, his master *par excellence*) writing, whereupon Wuzeerani, the ayah, lost her interest in the paper and her patience with her mistress, and went to see what she was doing. . She

entered the room with her usual stealthy tread, and seeing her mistress in such an attitude of *abandon*, thought she would try an experiment, and stealing noiselessly to the bed's head, she said suddenly and rather loud, "Burra sahib ka chitty mem sahib." \*

Ida put out her hand mechanically to take it,—"Very good; go now, and come back in an hour," she said, divining the cause of the woman's anxiety; and again turning her head back she put Arthur's letter against her face. It was cool; it came from her husband's hand, and contained a practical suggestion about something; and gradually her mind came back from the whirl of wild thoughts, from the region of feeling, to a realm of facts, hard but salutary, and to the knowledge that she had much to decide to-day. She opened the letter and re-read it, and in-

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\* "The great master's letter, ma'am."



stead of the vexation of the morning, there came a feeling of humility.

She felt very sorely humbled. Whatever she might feel or not feel, she had deeply wronged Arthur by the mere fact that words such as those of this morning should have entered her ears.

There was a dreadful crumbling about her of fancies which had always managed to group themselves about some pleasant conception of herself. She stood up in a terrible desert of bald facts. She was Arthur Craven's wife,—loved, honoured, and trusted. She had deceived him, played the fool like any base woman; she had allowed a man to make love to her; she had wronged him utterly; and was no more worthy to be his wife.

What was to come next she did not know. Her own strength was weakness, her own wisdom folly. She would simply do as she was told, and hope that some new strength would come to her in the doing.

She was best out of Peshawur ; she saw that. She had no confidence in herself, and without a thought that she and Hugh could ever meet again, it would be best to have as many miles between them as possible.

That was not a point to dwell on ; and she allowed herself very little time to think — returning to Arthur's business-like words as the best leading she could get. For years after she could tell every word of that letter. It seemed to print itself on her brain. Her mind and eye both caught at the words, "I shall be at Murdan to-morrow night (Friday), and will write to arrange everything for you."

It was now Friday morning. A little more time was spent in turning the words over in her mind, and a resolve forced itself through her submissiveness and her humility. She would see Arthur to-morrow morning, any how or where he might be.

For once she did not care what Arthur

might think or how he might take it. Matters had gone beyond that sort of thing, past any question of being satisfied, she with herself, or he with her. All that was over; he must be dissatisfied with her, that was clear; but she could not possibly live on under the burden of his love and trust, now that she was so entirely unworthy of it, for one unnecessary hour. She could not write to him, but she resolved whether she could or not to sit down at his feet, and tell him the whole story, and then go away where he sent her.

So she got up and wrote a line to Mr. Johnson, asking him if he would call on her about eleven o'clock on his way to kutcherry; then summoned the ayah, and as she dressed rapidly, greatly surprised that already astonished woman by saying that she was going to Hotí Murdan that night, and that she, the ayah, would have to join her at Attock or Murree, probably leaving on Sunday.

She had no misgivings about all this, no doubt but that she would carry it through. The sense of misery and unworthiness cooled her nerves and steadied her ; the excitement of her resolve stood her in place of strength ; and once fairly roused, she had a good deal of physical strength in reserve, and the Ida of to-day was a very different person to the Ida of three days back.

When Johnson came she told him that she must somehow go to Murdan that night. The young man was much taken aback. Of course, if need were, he could transport himself to any spot within a radius of sixty or seventy miles before morning, but the moving of a lady was a much more difficult thing, in these unsettled times too ; and he tried to dissuade her.

“ It will not be easy to get bearers,” he said ; “ the whole country is in a queer state just now. There used to be some at Haishki, after crossing the Cabul river, but it is twenty miles away, and it is quite an

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open question if there are any to be got there at present."

"Get me twelve men, they will carry me so far," she said; "and could you not send a runner to Haishki to have other twelve men ready to take me on to Murdan. I know twelve men take one forty miles without change in the hills, I don't see why they should not do the half of it here."

"But supposing you find no change at Haishki," he persisted.

"Then I will bribe the first set heavily to take me on. You might get me sixteen men here for the chance."

"But you will want a second set for your ayah," he said, wondering what could be the secret of all this determination. The women of his acquaintance did not generally sin from over-energy.

"I shall not take one," she answered, "I shall think it very good of you if you will arrange it for me." And she looked up at him, her anxious, pleading look ending

in a brighter smile than any one had seen on her face for long. She sorely needed the work done, and she used her woman's weapons to get it.

"Bribe the men highly, of course. I am very anxious about it."

"Is the colonel ill?" said Johnson, unable to keep his curiosity quite to himself.

"No," she said quietly; "but I know he is to be at Murdan to-night, and I must see him somehow."

"Then he does not know she is coming," was his mental comment. "They are a strange pair certainly!"

But it was of no use to object; and he left her, promising to do his best, but thinking it was quite the maddest thing he had heard of for a long time. If she had asked his opinion, he would have begged her not to go; but she had simply stated that she was going, and had ridden over his obstacles in a fashion that had mastered his better judgment.

But the more he thought of it the less he liked it. He had promised Craven to be all the use he could to her, but he had been too busy for much to come of it; and now her first request was this wild scheme. Should he go with her? That was impossible; he must not leave his post, being the only civilian left in the station. Really these women were too provoking. Why had nature made such incompatible compounds of helplessness and recklessness? If she came to grief it would be his fault, and she left him absolutely no word in the matter.

So he did her behest grumblingly. He procured a doolie and bearers, allotted a couple of mounted policemen to go with her as escort, and then wrote a word of remonstrance to clear his conscience.

“MY DEAR MRS. CRAVEN,—

“The doolie and sixteen bearers will be at your house at eight o'clock; also two

mounted policemen as a guard. But let me ask you, seriously, to put off your journey. The road is not safe for a lady alone: these police are wretched cowards, and will run away to a certainty if anything disagreeable should happen. I could go with you when Stevens returns.

“Sincerely yours,

“FRED JOHNSON.”

To this Ida answered at once—

“*Friday.*

“MY DEAR MR. JOHNSON,—

“I am very much obliged to you for the trouble you have taken. Let the men be punctual, for I should like to be at Murdan early. With many thanks,

“Sincerely yours,

“IDA CRAVEN.”

“That comes of advising a lady,” was his comment; and the matter passed from his mind.



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That Friday night was guest-night at the mess of the 50th Cavalry (Stanley's Horse). The colonel had a good deal of money, and so had one or two others, thus there was more of luxury at their mess than was usual with the small messes of native corps, and they kept house very pleasantly.

Their fortnightly guest-nights—for Stanley declined to be worried with outsiders more than once a fortnight—were very popular entertainments among the men of the English community, and they were often large gatherings. Besides a good many of whom we have heard nothing, almost all the men we know were of the party. Johnson was there, Maxwell and one of his subs, some men of the division staff, some Highlanders, some Hussars, and a good sprinkling of native infantry men, among whom was our old friend Major MacPherson. Hugh was there: he had had thoughts of pleading preparations, and so getting out of it, but he had invited

several men, and rather than in any way show the white feather, even to himself, he appeared, bearing himself quite bravely, though very quiet and a shade paler than usual.

The day had been a very heavy one for him. His own scanty preparations had soon been made; he then went down to the lines to tell his party that they were to wear some non-military cloak or dress over their uniforms, and putting all the wealth of red stuff that usually served for waist-band and turban out of sight, bind their heads with the dark blue turban of the country. It might be useful at times for them to be able to pass as unemployed frontier warriors, and it was just as well on this occasion to have as little the look of a party of troopers as possible.

The young boy recruits were in high spirits and satisfaction at the prospect of special service under the eye of their

already much loved officer; and the seniors were selected as being men of the country to which our young friends belonged.

Hugh felt heartsick and out of patience at all these details, but with it he was not sorry that there was something to be done, and that some fifty miles would lie between Ida and himself before morning, and when he met his commanding officer as he left the lines, he said—

“I suppose if I see the men safe housed, and explain their duties to them, there will be nothing more for me to do at Ali Mohammed.”

“No,” answered Stanley; “you could be back quite well on Monday. But why don’t you take a few days’ change,—shooting or something? You are looking very seedy.”

“Yes, sir,” said Hugh, “that was what I was about to ask. Could you spare me for a week? I would ride across country to Kohat,—I want to see a man there who is going home next month sick,—have a

day or two's shooting, and then come back through the Kohat pass."

"Yes, we can do quite well without you, say, till Monday week. Take care of yourself, and don't get shot in the pass," answered his colonel.

"I don't suppose I shall be," he said, and passed on.

Several times during the day it occurred to Hugh as an aggravation of pain—as a toothache may hurt more than a mortal wound—that Ida did not know he was going on this expedition. Their talk in the morning had been entirely of her and of Craven; then had come the words that so haunted Hugh all day. Sometimes he cursed his folly for speaking; but on the whole he felt it was a question of time; the truth would certainly have been said sooner or later. Her answer was also a matter of course. It was all that was in her to say. He seemed to know her so well. Of course that mad, miserable out-

burst of his had ended in a farewell and banishment from her presence for ever. But he had not expected some words which she had spoken; in particular, that she should have avoided the point when he had asked for an expression of love to her husband, as a sort of hope of hardening himself to the wrench before him.

Stunned as he was, in all solitary moments her words came back and back to him: she "loved God and her duty." It was well for her, these women had convenient minds; doubtless it would make her happy! With this, too, there came plenty of selfish thoughts. It was like a woman to make use of him, to let him come about her, to lean on him, trust to him for help and get it, never hesitate to make him love her and then to turn round on him with her religion and her duty at the inevitable moment when feeling mastered him. She should have thought of that before, she had had her fun like the rest, bring-

ing down full force upon the rest the blame that he knew would not well fit Ida. But he was very sore and miserable, and must blame some one.

He was glad he was leaving the station; he would go to Ali Mohammed, spend some days alone in the wild country round Kohat, and then come back, when he hoped she would be out of the place, to do his work as had done it before, as the only thing that was left to him.

He flattered himself that Woolett could read nothing of his thoughts; but when he said, with an air of profound and artificial gravity—"By the way, Woolett, I forgot to tell Mrs. Craven that I was going away to-night. Would you mind seeing her to-morrow, and telling her I am gone? And, stay, you might say that I shall not be back for a week or ten days,"—Woolett assented in his usual kindly tone, and made no comment, but he felt that he had received a confession.

It was half-past nine o'clock before the cloth was off the table at the cavalry mess that night. Cheroots were lighted, and wine and smoke loosened men's tongues, and conversation became more general. At Stanley's end of the table were the seniors with MacPherson among them, while Hugh, as vice-president, sat at the bottom of the table.

At Hugh's end conversation was both purposeless and noisy. Some irrepressible hussar boys were detailing their experiences in a snipe marsh, where the main object had evidently been to get into as much mud and water as possible, and generally to carry out the often described follies of the sport to the full, while the snipe seemed to have run very much less risk of their lives than their youthful hunters. Then broke in again the interminable horse and dog talk, till Hugh, who felt ten years older than his wont that night, and who had taken more than his usual allowance of wine,

with less than food enough, felt his head reel, and wondered how much longer he should keep his temper.

At the head of the table, among the seniors Maxwell was saying,

"At any rate the thing is working to a head at last. That attack on the Guides' camp did a world of good, making the head-quarter people believe it to be a serious matter; and now this Umb affair—we shall soon have the authorities red-hot for it."

"There is more news to-night," called out Johnson from half way down the table. "There was an attack this morning on Madad Khan's Tunawul levies; the native report says there are thirty men killed and wounded."

"That must be taken with reservation; say eight or nine," said Stanley, who had had a good deal of experience of the gasconading khans of the frontier.

"That may be, but it is a serious matter," answered Johnson. "It is the first real



bloodshed ; the tribes will soon warm to their work now."

"Take my word for it," said old MacPherson, "it will be as nasty inglorious a bit of bloodshedding as ever we have had to do yet, which is saying a good deal. I have seen a lot of these affairs, and I never saw one that promised worse. After receiving an insult, we have humbugged and hesitated for three mortal months, and no one knows when we shall get at them now ; certainly not before another month. No one has got any orders, and if they had they couldn't go. There is hardly a beast to carry anything in the valley. All the tribes round the Mahabun are absurdly cheeky, unlicked, and upsetting, to a man ; and to this moment nobody knows which, or how many of them, we are going to fight. We shall in time enter the hills with a force enormously too strong for its apparent work--Mulka and the Jydoons and that lot,—and when we get there, ten to one we shall find

that we have the whole hornet's nest as far up as Swat, buzzing about our ears. No end of us will go to heaven, which will of course only matter to individuals; but there will be a panic and a fuss, and the chances are we shall disgrace ourselves, and apologize, and make peace before the work is half done. We have done it before now, I seem to know the game by heart. It is a blessing Craven has some stuff in him. He is quite our only chance. So long as the politicals don't lose their heads, I don't fear for the soldiers."

During this speech of MacPherson's conversation had very much subsided to listen to him. He was a croaker, but had a character for a certain stumbling shrewdness that made the men round him pay attention, and all who knew him loved him for his simple kindly nature. Hugh had not paid much attention till Craven's name came in, when his ears became suddenly acute, and he experienced a violent fit of disgust at the sort of "mat-

ter of course praise these civilians always get."

Other voices again broke in, but above all Hugh heard Johnson say to his next neighbour,—

"I have had such a bother laying a dāk for Mrs. Craven to-day. Would you believe it, she went off to-night at eight o'clock by herself, not an ayah with her or anything, in a doolie to Murdan to meet Craven there. It is a mad thing to do; the road is really unsafe for one thing, and then Craven has a deal too much on his hands to be bothered with his wife. He won't thank me for sending her, but I could not help it."

On his already over-excited brain, these words told like magic. Hugh looked at his watch, it was only a little after ten. He rose at once from his seat and went to the head of the table, and stood for a moment behind Stanley.

"I think, sir, I had better go now. May I ask Franks to take my place?"

"Why I thought you did not need to leave till twelve; you are ready I suppose," answered Stanley.

"Yes, sir; but—but I was looking at the map, and find there is rough country between Haishki and Ali Mohammed. We shall want all the time," said Hugh, marvelling at his ready lie,—not a line his brain had had much practice in.

"All right," replied the senior. "Good-bye, Linwood." He grasped his hand. "Take care of yourself," and the young man was gone.

The noisy end of the table was hushed by Hugh's sudden departure. No one but Woolett had noticed Johnson's words, and their effect upon Hugh, and he at once exerted himself to fill his place, that no one might ask questions; and soon after the young men one and all went into the billiard-room, less to play than to have more space for their legs and voices.

It was a fine night, and the older men

went into the verandah in front of the mess room, and there broke up into knots. Stanley and MacPherson walked up and down under a row of willows in the garden. They had known each other before, and Stanley liked Mac for his genuine kind-heartedness and sterling soldierly qualities.

"What is your adjutant away for?" asked MacPherson.

"He has gone with a detail to a place, Ali Mohammed, a post on the left bank of the Cabul River. It seems that we are to keep men there during the operations to carry despatches, and I thought it best to send some one to see to it at once. I shall lose more men than I like before the business is over, but I quite decline to risk them in a tumble down fort. You never know how unwholesome those places are until you send an Englishman with eyes, and above all things a nose, to the spot."

"I am glad Linwood is out of this for a bit," said Mac. "Could not you leave him

there? The coffee-shops are getting hold of Mrs. Craven's name, and coupling it with his. You may not know of it, but it is a fact, and a pity."

"I supposed it was possible," answered Stanley, "but I am sure there is no reason for it. Mrs. Craven and Linwood are old friends,—connections I believe. There is not a more honourable fellow in the valley at this moment, and I am sure if ever a woman might be free from that sort of talk, it is Mrs. Craven; she is less of flirt than any woman I ever saw."

"That is the mischief of it," MacPherson went on, with emphasis. "Your honourable fellows and nice women get into worse holes than ever the fools and the flirts do. They go in for friendships and platonics and the rest of it, and so see the best of each other. As a consequence the matter goes very much deeper, and if they don't burn their fingers frightfully, they break their hearts."

"The theory may be right enough, but I

think you are wrong in the application," said Stanley.

"No," puffed the other thoughtfully. "I am afraid I'm right. Of course it is your duty to stick up for Linwood. So do I for both in public; but really if you could find something to do with him, at any part of the valley out of this for a month, would be a good thing; ay, more, it might be the saving of a woman."

"I assure you that I believe Mrs. Craven wants no saving," said Stanley, speaking on the theory that unless you contradict a scandal, you help to spread it; but yet thinking the possessor of the weary white face he had seen the previous day, wanted some kind of human help. "I have seen a good deal of both Craven and his wife this hot season. The notion seems a folly to me. She is certainly, whatever else she is, not an ordinary subject for station scandal."

"My dear fellow, I know that as well as

you do," said Mac. "But I tell you your high-strung, high-principled woman is the most dangerous animal under the sun. The ordinary kind are kept in check fifty ways, by Mrs. Grundy, by their vanity, by their quarrels, by their dressmakers' bills. Their faults and follies come to the rescue on all occasions; but I tell you honestly if I, which heaven forefend! were condemned to take a wife, there is no specimen of the dear creature I should be more utterly afraid of than your extraordinary good woman."

Stanley laughed. Mac was fond of paradoxes, and the question had gone beyond argument.

When Hugh left the mess-table, he had but one impulse—to overtake Ida. It was past ten. She had started at eight o'clock or a little later. Two hours of doolie meant, at the very best six miles. Pubbi, the last important place before the ferry, was twelve miles away. She would hardly be there be-



fore midnight, and he surely might overtake her by that time ; or, if not, very soon after she had left it. Their route lay together as far as Haishki, after which he went eastward, she almost due north, but he got no farther than this. She was there alone on a dangerous road ; and without any clear notion of what he meant by it, he felt that he was certainly going after her.

He went straight to the lines, where he found his party smoking together. In a very few words he told them that there was to be no more delay, they were to muffle themselves, look to straps and horseshoes, and be at the gate of his compound in a quarter of an hour.

Then he hastened home, threw off his mess clothes, and dressed himself in English mufti ; and over all drew long riding boots, a dust-coloured choga, girding his waist with a scarf of the same, into which he stuck a tiny six-barrelled revolver. He knew he had a more useful weapon in his holsters

besides, and by a last movement of vanity, rejecting a turban of the same quiet hue, he wrapped round his head a black Peshawur lungi with a gold border. His toilet was soon made, and he stood very handsome in his disguise. It was useful, as he would not be noticed at a distance. There was not the least pretence in it that he was not an Englishman, for his fair skin, blue grey eyes, and chestnut hair were quite unapproachable by any other race nearer than the Caspian. Had he arms enough? Quite, for Ali Mohammed, too many even for his ride to Kohat; but still he thought twice about his cavalry sabre, which had been useful in many a tough fight before.

“What nonsense!” he said; “I am not going to fight to-night. But yet, as he was leaving his room, he came hastily back, and from an array of miscellaneous weapons that were hanging on one of the walls, the only piece of tidiness in the house, he took down an old fashioned native tulwar, very strong

and serviceable, which he fastened somehow into the girdle, and then quickly left the house.

A big powerful "whaler" was standing ready, with an English saddle; and, as he reached the verandah, he saw his party waiting for him, sitting on their horses, still and silent as statues; only as he appeared all the right hands rose to salute him.

He felt the girths, shook the straps of the bit and bridle, to be sure that all was firm; then leaping into the saddle, gave the signal to start. They left the compound leisurely; they went quietly along between the walls and trees of the station. Then out into a desolate open space of uncertain level, honey-combed with the graves of many generations of pious Muslims, with their heads to Mecca, whose last repose had been often enough disturbed by jackal and hyena, to judge from the holes in the ground. They passed under the queer

double storied house, known as Mackison's. This the troopers did not half like at this hour of night, and whispered as they went eerie legends to each other about it. It had the reputation of being haunted by a ghost, variously described as that of the murdered political officer, and his less celebrated Affghan murderer. A dismal looking place it was, in a melancholy situation. Not a native could be persuaded to enter it after nightfall, and of the two or three adventurous Englishmen who, since Mackison's death had tried to inhabit it, all had left it very shortly, owing they said, to the inconvenience; but nothing would persuade the natives, but that they also had been visited by the spirit of Mackison Sahib.

Such was the spot past which Hugh and his troopers rode quietly in the dim weird light. When they had cleared the tombs and neared the city, Hugh broke into a rapid trot, at which pace they passed along under the city wall. Eleven o'clock struck from the

gong in the citadel; and once clear of the city wall, off went Hugh at a hand gallop, followed with hearty good will by the sowars, who liked nothing better than a mad pace, specially as their own horses were safe across the Cabul river, and they were taking it out of some sturdy government remounts.

To Hugh, as he galloped on, the cool air and the pace was something of a relief. He did not want to think, but he wanted to know that his brain could work again. One thing only was clear: that the twelve miles which lay between him and Pubbi, must be passed as rapidly as possible. Though he did not wish to come up to Ida before Pubbi, he did not want to be much behind there. All this piece of the road was the trunk road to Attock, and safe enough; but after that it was doubtful; after the ferry, definitely dangerous. The first point was to reach Pubbi; and so on they pelted. It would be time enough to think when there. Perhaps then

he would know what he meant, and if there was any sense in this hurried foolish start of his. He was there against his common sense and better judgment, just because he felt he *must*.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *"ROAD UNSAFE."*

IDA had got through the day wonderfully : fighting the thoughts which were so entirely miserable and impossible, so bad that there was really no thinking them, by action, and the arrangement of practical details. She would do as she was told ; but she felt she was quite safe in preparing for a month's absence, and that in all probability Murree would be her fate. So she turned out winter clothing, packed plate and linen, made the servants pack crockery, glass, and lamps enough for her own use. She knew she could only count on bare tables and chairs, in what was called, by courtesy, a furnished house at Murree ; and lastly, with a feeling of utter impatience, made a selection of finery. Then came in the sense of unreality. She would have to go out, and look like amusing

herself; people would be civil to her, and even fuss over her as the commissioner's wife. Bah! the thought of it seemed more than she could stand. However, she set her teeth; she must be impatient of nothing. What was she, untrue as a woman, and faithless as a wife! Who was she, to be contemptuous of any bit of the life she had to lead!

It did not seem that there was any question of ever again being contented with herself. she must live in action, and leave behind thoughts, and more than all dreams. Of the meeting with Arthur she would not think; not that she feared for her resolution, but surely it would be enough when it came: nothing could prepare her for it, or hinder it being the only right. So she gave her whole mind to household matters; she packed up all her many possessions, those that were to go, in their boxes, and left the house in good order for Arthur if he should come back without her. She put away her own personal knick-knackeries: there should be no



jarring on him of small things connected with this wife who was unworthy.

At six o'clock she tried to eat, but found that a failure. She could do most other things, but she could not eat; and was very glad of the coming of the native banker, who kept their money, as an excuse for leaving her dinner untouched. At last even that business was done. She had put some money in a long forgotten purse,—alone on a journey she might want some,—though in a general way, from week's end to week's end she never saw actual coin, and never, since she had been in India, had she carried any in her pocket until now. She left money for the present with the khansamah, and with Hunamān—sufficient money to start servants and boxes to the hills, if that was to be it. She had neglected nothing, but by this time she was fearfully tired,—so tired that she could not sit still, and moved about doing comparatively useless things because she had no power to rest.

The servants were in a great state of excitement ; they did not know what to make of this hurried move of their young mistress. Hunamān, who was the most attached to her of all (he had held out very stiffly against her rule for long, and, while still objecting to her in theory, had now given in a very hearty personal allegiance), confided to his brother an opinion that the fever was responsible, and pointed to his forehead, and put his head on one side, with the air of awe with which all Asiatics refer to mental aberration, and giving over charge of affairs to Nerhoo, he decided to follow the doolie that night, without saying a word to any one.

Wuzéerani was very mysterious, and portentously wise, and told her friend the khan-samah, that the wife of the Adujant Sahib's khitmutgar had been with her that morning, and had said that the adjutant of the cavalry was leaving the station that night. She was quite sure that the Mem Sahib was not going to Murdan, and prophesied that the household

would be broken up, and they would all be dismissed in a few days.

The khansamah with a profounder knowledge of the excessive oddity and unreasonable truthfulness of the English,—come of thirty years' service among them (while Wuzéerani had only taken service late in life, after the death of her husband, a cavalry sowar)—contradicted this supposition; but they both watched Ida closely all day, till she was fain to do more than was necessary of her work herself, to be free from the silent criticism of their eyes.

At last she was off, and alone. What a relief it was! She closed her eyes, and laid herself back in her doolie. The doolie, familiar enough to all our Anglo-Indian readers, may want a little description for the uninitiated.

It was bamboo frame work, seven feet in length, by three in width, and four in height; the bottom laced with rope, the rest covered with coarse canvas. There was an open space each side to enter by, and this could be, and

was, closed by curtains of the same coarse canvas. The thing was borne on a stout bamboo pole, thrust all through it, protruding sufficiently at each end for two men to bear it. A little shelf above the feet held a book and a few biscuits; and a mass of rugs and pillows served as bedding.

They passed out of the station by the same route that Hugh took later, and along the road to Pubbi.

So long as she was in the vicinity of the station or city, she could not believe that she was really alone and away.

Then only did she try to realize what she was going to do when she reached Murdan. How would Arthur take it? What would become of her? She had no manner of notion. Her mind was terribly confused by this time, so that she could hardly bring herself to think it mattered, so heavily lay upon her the obligation to be free of the burden of his confidence. On herself she was most uncompromisingly hard, but the thought of

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Arthur made her very sad for him. Her thoughts of Hugh were all over-ridden by the appalling sense that they must never in life meet again ; they were dead to each other ; and she turned from all attempt to realize what it would be to him, saying, "It is just the same as if I had died."

She was very sorely humbled, as we have said, and was going to clear her conscience, knowing that in so doing she would in no way right herself. Happily for her, she was dead tired. Fever, excitement, and then a long day of incessant and unusual physical exertion had so worn her out, that she was past being miserable. Her mind would not work. She found herself listening to the monotonous cadenced grunt of the bearers, and then lost even that ; and before she had been an hour away from Peshawur, she was sound asleep.

The mounted policemen behind her were rather pleased with this service, for they knew that it would certainly earn them a liberal present from the commissioner or his wife in the

morning; so they were active in keeping the doolie-bearers up to their work, and the pace for a doolie was splendid.

Hunamān never left the side of the doolie, where he ran just out of sight. He knew he would not be discovered till morning, when he could either return or stay, according to whether his mistress was vexed with his officiousness, or, what was more likely, was good to him, and let it pass. He managed some time in the course of the first two hours to ascertain that she was asleep; and when they reached Pubbi, which they did before half-past eleven, having left Peshawur quite punctually at eight o'clock, he arranged that she should not be disturbed. Very little time was allowed; the doolie was put down outside the village, and Hunamān sat beside it while the bearers went to drink and prepare the torch, which was necessary on the rougher road they would now be travelling on. They had progressed very quickly, and still, after Pubbi, kept up the pace, and were on the

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Cabul River and on board the ferry-boat by half-past one. Here, too, Ida's guardians watched over her; noise was prohibited, and the nineteen men seemed to have but one object—to carry her safe and quietly.

The change of motion and the plashing of the oars roused her; and she looked out to the stars and the gleaming water, with an odd sense of being absolutely loose on the face of the earth.

The stillness, cool and quiet of the night was delicious. It occurred to her as strange that she should be so safe and cared for at this time of night, alone in the wild country of whose lawlessness she had heard so much of late. She was a woman and perfectly defenceless, save for a little double-barrelled pistol that she had placed loaded under her pillow on leaving that evening. Arthur had given her the little weapon in the early days of their Peshawur life, and had taught her to use it, as a knowledge that might be useful. She was sometimes alone in the house, and

thieves were common enough. She now put her hand on it, patted it, with a feeling that it was a friend; listened a little to the low hum of native voices and again opened the curtains and looked out to the water, with a sleepy wonder that anything so fresh and cool was left in nature after her experiences of the last six months. Then throwing herself back again, she pulled a shawl over her shoulders with a feeling of great physical content at wanting anything to warm her; and soon, after many howls and much jolting, she was again on firm ground. A voice that sounded very familiar she had surely heard behind her in a sort of stage whisper; but she was not yet so well used to India and its natives as not to have an impression that these latter, like sheep, were very much alike, and so did not entirely connect the familiar voice with its owner. But it did still further increase the feeling of content; and very soon after the monotonous chant had been resumed,



she was again unconscious of it and all else.

Hugh had reached Pubbi about half-past twelve to find no trace of Ida; though as the main road lay right through the village, and then the branch turned off towards the river, there was no possibility of his having missed her. She could not be far ahead now, so he allowed ten minutes' rest to breathe the horses, and then trotted along the road at a more moderate pace, making sure that he would overtake her soon. The road they were on was unmetalled, with six good inches of dust, and no lack of stones. It had from time to time rather dangerous holes in it; and the old duffadar wondered not a little that the adjutant sahib ordinarily so careful, should insist on even so much of speed through the darkest part of the night; for later the moon would rise, and it would be easier to avoid the big stones and broken ground.

However blunderers' fortune attended them,

and on they went without accident, though the pace did not please Hugh, for still Ida and the doolie were not to be seen.

The power over thought and clearer vision that Hugh had counted on after a good hour's gallop had come, but not quite in the shape that he expected. He had expected from himself an opinion of what he meant by this, and whether he should or should not follow Ida; he now found mind and body bent on that object with absolutely no questioning. Of course she should not see him, and must not know of his presence, but he must finish this miserable task of his by seeing her safe to Murdan. He had it all planned out,—what was to be done and how it was to be managed. Once the doolie was in sight he would halt, and then follow at a distance as far as Haishki, the point where their routes diverged, where his horses were waiting, and where she would probably get fresh bearers. Haishki, Murdan, and Ali Mohammed might be considered as the three

angles of a triangle of which the road from Haishki to Ali Mohammed was the base, and instead of proceeding quietly along it, he would go round the northerly angle at Murdan, regaining his party at Ali Mohammed some time in the course of the day.

After Haishki he would have Rapid under him, in whose powers he now felt great confidence. He would take one of these boys with him, to learn the route round by Murdan to Ali Mohammed by practical experience, and they must keep Ida's party as well in sight as they could without exciting attention. The duty of the little detachment being to open direct communication from Murdan to Attock *viâ* Ali Mohammed, it would be something gained that one of them should have gone over so much of the road. It was a sign how far Hugh's mind had recovered its natural balance, that he believed that he would be doing his duty to the State more thoroughly, and enhancing the value of the

detachment, by making in person this detour round by Murdan. So he felt excellent again, but still feverishly anxious till he should come up with Ida and her party.

He had hoped to catch them at Pubbi, and wondered all along the six or seven miles between that place and the river bank that he did not overtake them. Arrived on the river he found the ferry-boat on the water, actually conveying her across. Of course they must wait, and had indeed to wait much longer than was reasonable. They shouted and hallooed, but to very little purpose; and it was only after a considerable delay that the ferry-boat returned, the headman making most profuse apologies to the distinguished travellers; saying, that they had just conveyed the burra sahib's wife across the water, and had only now with hot haste returned. The hot haste had included a good deal of hubble-bubble and some pleasurable and exciting conversation on the opposite bank. Hunamān having

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very liberally dealt out backsheech, it had been necessary to make then and there a division of the spoil, according to the age and standing of the men.

This was very exasperating to Hugh, who knew that at Haishki, only a couple of miles now beyond the river, Ida would change bearers rapidly, to judge by the activity that had been displayed in all her movements to-night, and he much wanted to overtake the doolie before their roads parted. Might it not still be, that after seeing her guarded by police and hemmed in with bearers, he might find that the requirements of the service did not impose upon him that farther detour by Murdan! However, they crossed the river at last, and galloped into Haishki at a rattling pace.

His keen eye detected the group he was in search of as they entered the village. The doolie, in all its natural ugliness, a long dingy box, was set down in front of the police choki. Ida's guardians had gone in to have

a smoke and talk with their brethren of the place, leaving their horses tied to the rude verandah posts. By the side of the doolie sat Hunamān, and round, in various attitudes, stood or squatted the fresh bearers, ready to start, waiting the pleasure of the police.

Hugh felt his heart beat wildly as he passed, muffling himself closely, as he did not want Hunamān whom he recognised, to see him. Within those dingy curtains lay Ida, who had only that morning half confessed that she loved him. There she was, guarded by police, with a crowd of natives round her. It seemed to him, spite of his knowledge of facts, that she was being carried off from him to the husband who was the embodiment of "duty," which I am afraid, as he passed, he characterized as a wretched fetish, in honour of which all possibility of happiness for both of them was being deliberately sacrificed. He looked back in the faint hope that he would see

a hand, or even some slight movement of the dark heavy canvas curtain. But, no; all was perfectly still and quiet. Was she asleep? That seemed out of the question. Was she awake,—what was in her mind? He had not taken in her motive in going away to Craven. Indeed, as far as he thought of it at all, he ascribed it to a lower motive than the true one.

"She need not have run away from me," he said. "She shall never see me again unless she wants me, or I can be some good."

By the time he had passed through the village, and reached the gateway on the road to New Nowshera, where the horses were waiting for them, all hesitation was over: he was going to Murdan whether Ida wanted him or did not want him, or whether the public service would gain or lose by the process.

He had to explain his movement to some extent to the duffadar, saying that he would

rejoin them at Ali Mohammed at noon, coming across country from Hoti Murdan, where he had business, and that he would take one of the young men with him that he might learn the route. So he shifted his saddle to Rapid's back, caressing the noble creature who had been so often petted by Ida, and was in some sort a mutual friend; for until Ida had noticed him, the new red charger had only been a handsome valuable horse, and had since become a personal friend to both. It was soon done, and Hugh chose as his companion the eldest of the boy recruits: a slight wiry fellow, with the eye of a hawk, and a wrist of iron, by name Ibrahim Khan. He liked the look of him greatly, and promised that he would draw him out by-and-by, when this fever was so far set at rest that Ida was safe in her husband's camp.

The whole party were considerably astonished at his change of plan; but military



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discipline forbade all comment; and charging the duffadar not to delay more than a half an hour there, and to pass any desolate country rapidly, Hugh mounted Rapid, and, followed by Ibrahim, returned to the village gate. Not taking the shortest cut to the Murdan road, he went across the village again till he came within sight of the police choki. His object was to see if Ida was still there, but she was gone, and he stopped a hackery driver to ask which was the road to Hoti Murdan, and then trotted off in the direction indicated.

She could only have got a little start this time, but he must see the doolie once more to be sure it was on the right road. In a very short time after leaving the village, he passed the crest of some little low hills, and entered a small plain some two or three miles in circumference, along which he could trace the white road for a good distance, and not far before him could see the flicker of a torch, and even heard the

grunt in cadence of which we have spoken before.

Then, and only then, did Hugh awake to a knowledge of the extreme tiresomeness—by any common sense standard, of the task he had set himself. He was to go twenty miles at a safe distance behind a doolie whose best pace, taking into account sixteen bearers, Hunamān, and the police, would still be well under four miles an hour; while Rapid could walk five, and could not walk less than four. It was not an inviting prospect. About three o'clock a.m. now, it would be eight or nine before Murdan would be in sight, and he would be off duty.

It was a very tiresome folly, and he could have laughed at himself, but that the bitter mood returned, and he said it was very like what he had been doing all the summer, and notably a most fitting end to the September game. It had not mattered what he thought, or how he suffered. He was

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to be made such use of as might be, a foolish make-believe sort of service it had always been; and then he sent off to the desert to make the most of duty. And yet no thought of turning back came out of these cavilling thoughts. He became conscious that he was frightfully thirsty, as his horse's feet splashed in a little watercourse that crossed the road at the bottom of a small ravine. The bit of ground at the lower level seemed very fertile. Some trees and shrubs were there, and a plot of rice was fast reaching perfection. He threw himself from his horse, and regardless of the common character for unwholesomeness of all such streams throughout the valley, he drank deep and eagerly. He felt something under his feet that seemed like grass, and it struck him that he could hardly do better than give the doolie a start. So he spread his cloak on it, and lay on his back to smoke, gazing through the feathery branches of a tamarisk up to the stars.

Ibrahim had likewise dismounted, and was holding both horses, sitting perched on a bit of rock between their heads, and was meditating profoundly on the strangeness of these British gentlemen, who risk so much for so little. To his mind this was neither the time nor the place for open-air enjoyment.

Half an hour may have passed in this way, and Hugh was feeling a little sleepy, when suddenly there came a tramp of hurried feet, then some one cleared the water-course with a bound, almost alighting on his toes. He started up. Then came a shout of defiance which was speedily hushed by another man who followed, and who pointed out that these were not their enemies, and that they had no time for anything but the work immediately in hand. Bare headed, scantily clothed, with their lighted matches in their hands, with their firelocks, though not unfriendly they seemed very wild customers. When interrogated in their own tongue, they answered that there had been

robbers at their village that night, who had escaped, carrying considerable plunder, and that they were now pursuing, and so they hurried on up the ravine.

This little excitement restored Hugh's equilibrium a good deal. If such was the state of the country, it was not so absurd to look after Ida; and the mere notion of these ruffians, or the like of them, whether robbers or robbed, frightening her, was enough to turn all his thoughts again into the channel of protection. He thought of his love, not of himself; and soon they were mounted again, and riding slowly across the little plain of which I have spoken. He had not reached the farther end of it, when a tread of horses' hoofs was heard as of men in hot haste or absolute terror. As they approached, Hugh distinguished the scarlet turbans of the district police, and at once grasped the fact that they were Ida's guards. He threw the turban end that had muffled his face away that he might be known as an English-

man, and shouted to them to stop. This they did, and with terror-stricken faces and excited tongues, they gave him an incomprehensible story of hill warriors, strong, mighty, and many, who had swooped down upon the doolie, slashing and slaying all around them; that most of the bearers were killed; that the lady was carried off; and that they only lived to tell the tale. With a word of scorn, and a stern command to follow now, or he would shoot them dead, he put spur into Rapid's side, and galloped along the road at a tremendous pace. Why had he ever let her out of his sight! Some black thoughts and terrors assailed him, but he thrust them back manfully. He was quite cool, ready for anything, if he could only help her. And he clattered along the road with a feeling of gladness stronger than all the rest. He may see her once more, for he is wanted.

When Hugh was leaving the ravine, Ida, three miles ahead, had passed the little plain

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and entered some rough wild country. The ground was much broken into small ravines; sometimes the road skirted one, sometimes had to cross it; or again, they would be going along with a high bank on one hand, and a series of holes or hollows on the other. It looked uncanny. The moon was rising, and it was already definitely lighter, but still the road was alarming. The head man of the bearers blew up his torch to frighten wild beasts, though the policemen were against the light being shown at all, as calculated to inform any border robbers who might be near the road, that they were passing along it. Since leaving the Cabul River, Ida had slept quietly on the whole. Hunamān had paid the backsheesh to the set of bearers who had been left behind at Haishki, so there had been no serious disturbance for her. Sometimes a jolt or a shock would rouse her to partial consciousness, but it only brought a feeling of *bien-être*; it was cool, she was going some errand

which had duty as its aim, and then faded to unconsciousness again. She must about this time have been sleeping more soundly than usual, when there came the report of a matchlock, then another, and the doolie sank down in front with a shock that sent Ida in a heap to the foot of it, and the air that had been before so still and quiet seemed alive with shrieks and shouts from far and near, and with the near ones came some groans of pain.

The doolie came at last to the ground on all its four feet, and Ida threw up the curtain, and looked out. There were certainly blows being dealt in anger. A native whose figure was familiar to her stood before the open side of the doolie, and with a stick seemed to be trying to keep off assailants. Ida's heart stood still, but her newly awakened senses could give her no clear impression of what had taken place. "Road unsafe" came into her mind—this was what it meant; but what was to happen next?



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She felt for and grasped her little pistol, and looked out again, but the man immediately in front was certainly a defender; the blows were very hard ones, and the toy pistol seemed quite unequal to the occasion. Where were the police? She put out her head to look, and could see nothing of them. Then she saw the gleaming of a long Afghan knife, and it seemed to be lost somewhere in the body of the man before her, who sank to the ground, gasping to her, "Mem Sahib, stay quiet." The opposition being over (there was no one left to make any), the marauders proceeded to their work. They possessed themselves of all the baggage (there was not much of that), and a savage looking head, with eyes wild with excitement, was pushed into the doolie, and a hand held out as if begging. She obeyed the motion mechanically, giving her purse to the man, and wondering if her death was to come next in the shape of a dig from the long knife that she had seen do its

murderous work only a minute before. She did not fire at them, though it passed through her mind to do so; they were many; she was so sure to have the worst of it, that it was of no use. All she had to do was to take it quietly, and not to make a fuss. The curtains of the doolie were now thrown up on either side, and the men all crowded round to look. She sat quiet, calm, and steady. One of them said, "Shah bash!" (*bravo*) the only word in all the clatter of tongues that she could understand. Then there came hasty conference on the part of her captors, which seemed to refer to means of progress, for one of them went to the front of the doolie pole, and lifted the doolie up with a jerk, to test its weight. Matters were too serious for Ida to feel much aggrieved by this unmannerly jolt at her feet. The three bearers who had had hold of the doolie when the attack commenced, being moved by Hunamān's plucky example, had stayed, and had been caught

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hold of by the thieves, the fourth bearer had been the victim of one of the early matchlock shots. The consultation was soon over; the object of the enemy was evidently to move her somewhere, as they shook the fallen coolie to no purpose, for he was stone dead. Then they turned to Hunamān and shook him; then fetching some water, they poured it over him, and put him on his feet; he was not killed, but had a frightful gash in his left arm. As soon as the ruffians saw that he could stand, he was directed by signs to take the front of the doolie pole; the other three men were set to work, and the doolie was moved rapidly off the high-road, and down into a deepish ravine. There was no trace of any of the spare bearers, or of the police as they left the road; for Ida had looked anxiously when she felt the doolie turning. They had all clearly run away at some stage in the fight. It had all passed so rapidly, that not ten minutes had elapsed

from the time the first shot was fired till they turned down off the road, leaving no trace of the deed but the body of the dead bearer.

She was closely guarded,—a man walking on each side of her. After getting her money they seemed to take no further notice of her, and had put the curtains down; but they were certainly carrying her away. Was it death, or captivity, or what, that she was going to? She felt very glad that she had done nothing to draw attention to her little weapon, and put it carefully into the bosom of her dress. It was quite the most valuable possession she could have at that moment. It was long since such a glow of thankfulness had come over her as came now at the thought that she had thus her life in her own hand, and could send one of those little bullets safe through her head if necessary. For the present she would wait and see. She was so utterly startled and awe-struck, that she had not room or thought for ordinary

fear. In this realm of the utterly unknown, she had more a feeling of strong curiosity than anything else, though death in some shape, either from one of those horrible long knives, or from a friendly little bullet, was the most likely end of it.

The thought of Arthur came to her, but instead of thinking of his grief with any sort of regret, it was with a feeling of vexation, that she should do him this much more wrong, as to go and get killed here in his district, particularly when he had told her not.

It was a different sort of motion to the steady trot along the high-road. The foremost bearer, in whom Ida had recognised Hunamān, was unused to the work, and sorely wounded, and soon became too faint from loss of blood to do anything, and the doolie was put down. Then, with a good deal of joking and merriment, one of the robbers had to try his hand, or rather his shoulder, and on they went. Ida was most

unmercifully shaken, and they seemed to be going up and down steep bits of broken ground, and blows fell on the heads and shoulders of the coolies to make them keep up a good pace.

At last they stopped, strange voices were heard, also the creak of a heavy gate; and as Ida peeped out she saw that they entered a walled enclosure. The doolie was now put down before an inner door, the curtain on the one side thrown up, and Ida was not very uncivilly, it seemed to her, ordered to come out of the doolie. She obeyed, but when she tried to stand she found she trembled so much as nearly to fall. She managed to overcome it, and when one of the robbers, who seemed to her to be the leader, signed to her to follow, she walked after him, guarded by another man behind, and entered a long narrow hall. Its walls were mud, its roof was of blackened rafters; at one side was a charpoy, and a stool or two; there were some heaps of dirty blankets, and rude cooking

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utensils, and a small wood fire over which something was cooking.

A frightful smell of wood smoke, garlic, native tobacco, and dirty Asiatic, pervaded the place. But to Ida's inexpressible comfort, near the fire, evidently in charge of the cooking, sat a woman,—a tall, illfavoured, wild looking creature, clad with full blue trowsers, and very little else, but still a woman; and Ida turned from following her guide, who seemed to be leading her to the charpoy, and sat down on the ground close beside her.

Oh, the babel of voices that arose! The inhabitants of the house had been expecting the warriors back from a night's work, but this captive was evidently something too exciting for any one of the party to allow any of the others to get in a word. The doolie bearers were brought in, put in a corner, and there warned to keep quiet, while Hunamān was brought to the front, and counsel was taken about his wound.

From the care that was taken of the bearers,

Ida judged that she was to be removed to some more distant place of captivity, probably across the frontier, but whether by day or night, she had no means of guessing; for all the conversation was carried on in Pushtu, and her knowledge of eastern tongues began and ended with a little Hindustani. She wondered if she dared to speak to Hunamān, when she saw one of the men beginning to apply a bit of filthy rag to his wound.

She tore a strip off the bottom of her petticoat, and rose, making signs that that would be best. Whereupon they brought Hunamān to her, and though entirely ignorant of how to do it, and very frightened of hurting him, she managed to bind the wound, of which, at another time, the mere sight would have made her feel faint.

As she did it, she spoke to him, telling him that she had seen his bravery, and if, as was probable, she was to be carried off into the hills, she trusted that he would stay with her if he could.



Worn and exhausted as he was, the man's eyes glistened as he answered, that only death should remove him from her. It was better not to talk much, so the Hindu rolled himself in his bloody chuddah, and laid down near the doolie bearers.

Ida now turned to see what was to be made of her unpromising hostess. A child cried, and out of a heap of dingy cloth, the woman took the oddest little bright-eyed, black-faced baby, without any clothes, but with considerable ornament in the way of bangles and charms. The child was howling lustily, when its eye fell on Ida, and it hushed at once, and stared on the unfamiliar white object with bright black eyes open to the very fullest.

Ida smiled at the child's expression of blank wonderment, and it turned its head to its mother's breast, but only to turn back again, with a look of more utter wonderment than before.

Ida held up her hand to him, moving her white fingers rapidly before his face ; the

mother seemed a little anxious at first, but as the child smiled and crowed, the kindly look on Ida's face softened her, and she put him down on the white lady's lap.

This was more than she had counted on, but it was a mark of confidence ; and she, as a captive, was not in a position to choose, so she made the best of it, and proceeded to amuse the baby as well as she could. At this the men laughed and shouted, and it seemed to have altogether a favourable effect on the audience.

All at once there came a knocking at the outer gate, and Ida's heart gave a bound, but sank again, as she heard from without a queer nasal whine, which was answered from within the inclosure with doubtful voices. Then the whine grew more pitiful and complaining. It must be some fretful old beggar-man. Then there was hurried consultation, the heavy bolts were drawn aside, and the gate creaked on its hinges.

In a moment an English shout rang through

the building. The woman snatched the child from Ida. There was a shriek and a scuffle, and in rushed Hugh Linwood, followed by Ibrahim and the policemen, now brave enough under a good leader.


## CHAPTER IX.

### *DANGER.*

WE have now to explain how Hugh had found Ida, as well as how it was there had been so much delay. As far as he could afterwards gather, the policemen must have at first left the road to hide themselves, and only when all seemed quiet again had returned to ride off along the open road in the direction of Haishki. They were horribly frightened, and were scampering off at a rattling pace when Hugh met them, as we have described.

They were then, of course, obliged to turn, though not feeling any enthusiasm in the duty, or much hope of a favourable result.

The spot was soon reached where the affray had taken place, marked past all doubt by the body of the doolie bearer. They turned it over, found that the man



had not long been dead, and from the fact that none of his clothes had been touched, concluded that the robbers were not petty thieves but probably a formidable party from the hill country.

The question was, Where was Ida? She had evidently been carried off in her doolie; but in which direction, and how far? The police, in answer to Hugh's eager inquiries and demand for a description of the affair (which he made in the hope that something might indicate to him what to do next), talked the most incoherent rubbish. At last he drew from them the statement that all the bearers but three, and the sirdar, whom Hugh knew to be Hunamān, had run away. From this he hoped that Ida could not be very far off, and might be hidden in one of the ravines, or more probably in some tower or house close at hand.

There were none to be seen, but the policemen said they knew of a round tower

perched on a cliff to the right of the road. To this they marched with all due speed; but their summons at the door brought out a fine old Eusufzai farmer, whose surprise and strong language at their story were to all appearance quite unaffected. "But," he said, "to the left of the road a couple of miles away, among the ravines, is a strongly fortified house belonging to one Abdulla Khan, who has long had a land-tax quarrel with the government, and is quite the most reckless character in the district. He might easily have done the deed, or be sheltering some one else who has. You had better be quick, or they will carry the lady off to the hills; and in the present state of feeling among the tribes, you may have a difficulty in getting her back." And seeing that Hugh still hesitated, he added, "Look, sir, into my hall, and you will be convinced that we have passed a quiet night."

And there was truly ample evidence of

a quiet night having been spent by the whole household.

"Will you give me a guide to the house you speak of?" asked Hugh.

"It is useless," answered the old man; "you will never get in."

"That is our business," Hugh said impatiently. "We must have a guide."

"Well, if you will promise to protect him from Abdulla Khan's vengeance," said the old man, "my son shall go with you."

"Yes, yes," said Hugh again; "he shall be rewarded and protected. It shall be long before Abdulla shall dare to show his face in the country; only every moment is precious. Let him come."

"Truly every moment is precious," assented the old man, and he went to one of several shrouded figures that lay on the ground at the farther side of the circular room, and shook it sharply. A fine young fellow sprang to his feet, seized his long knife and his matchlock before he under-

stood what the duty was. But it was soon explained to him, and they left the tower together. The path the young Patan took led them again past the scene of the fray, and some traces of blood and the torch lying extinguished on the ground as they left the road was another argument that they were on the right track; and on they went at a swift pace silently.

A very short time brought our party within sight of Abdulla Khan's little fort. It was a double-storeyed house of some pretension, surrounded by a high wall of uncemented stones.

Their guide now told them that if they wanted to get any nearer they must leave their horses. How was it to be done without weakening the little party by leaving a man in charge? Ibrahim Khan was found to have his regulation picketing ropes rolled up and hanging to his saddle. That made it easy. These, carefully managed and divided, served to tether the four horses in



such sort that there was no fear of their taking advantage of the occasion either to get free or to fight. They were safe out of sight, too, in one of the innumerable little hollows into which the ground was broken up.

This done, they ascended to the main level, where Abdulla Khan's house could be seen quite close on a piece of rising ground.

They drew near to it, taking advantage of all the cover they could find, stooping down, sometimes even creeping on hands and knees, in case there should be a watch kept from the roof. They approached it unobserved, and at last stood close under the wall. It was high, and rather beyond scaling, if not for himself and Ibrahim, at least Hugh felt sure it was hopeless to expect the policemen to go over it. Even, he calculated, if they were hauled on to the top the risk of their dropping down to the safe side of the wall, if matters

looked formidable within, was one he dared not face. Whatever happened he must not fail; that would be for Ida a worse risk even than leaving her unmolested in the robbers' hold. But he could as little leave her as he could risk a failure. Enter he must and would, — but how? The only aperture was a large heavy door, to all appearance strongly barred from within. It was not an easy task; and they withdrew to the shelter of some bushes, and held a whispered consultation.

“Are you sure that the lady is there?” said Ibrahim.

“Yes; it seems most likely,” was Hugh's answer; and his eye at that moment fell on a round white thing at his foot. He stooped to pick it up. It was an English biscuit. There was but one way that it could have reached that spot. “Yes, she is certainly there; and we must get in somehow.”

An odd expression between fear and awe came over the young trooper's face: “I will

play the Pir Dastgir," he said. "You shall get in; only be close behind here ready to make a rush whenever the door is opened."

"What do you mean?" asked Hugh.

"Never mind; trust me, and be ready, and you shall be inside that gate very soon," answered the other.

"You shall be rewarded," said Hugh; "and I——" But the young man put up his hand, and the awed look returned.

"May Heaven pardon me! I shall be using holy words in the service of infidels," he said. "I would not do it for reward, only for your service."

He then proceeded to take off all his upper clothes, and stood before them in a dirty shirt, and a waistcloth that fell in loose folds to his ankles. This he further improved with a few tares, and some dust. He laid aside his turban, and threw dust on his long, glossy hair, and scored some wrinkles on his forehead, and round the side of his mouth.

It was not easy to recognise the handsome

young sowar, when his disguise was complete. Hastily hiding his long knife and pistol about him, and taking a stick in his hand, he hobbled forward, beckoning to Hugh and the rest to keep near, but in the shadow.

When they were hid and ready, Ibrahim began a succession of shouts, which always ended in a pleading whine :—

“For the love of God and the prophet, open, open, to a holy man, a traveller in the way of salvation, a pearl in the casket of dignity. Open to one who has seen the holy shrines, the places of happy ending. Open to one who has been with mortifications, and fightings for faith ; for ever journeying and never resting. Open, I say, open. I come to tell of the holy war, of Kafirs sent to hell, and the triumph of the holy faith.” And then, as there were signs of parleying from within, the whine got deeper and stronger, with a nasal note in it, so indescribably comic, that Hugh, in spite of all that was at stake and his breathless excitement almost laughed.

"Perdition on your fathers!" went on the false fakir. "To leave a holy man, one joined-unto-God, hungry and weary at your gates! Open, I say, open, to hear good news."

At last the bolts were heard slowly to move back, and a small chink of the gate was opened. Ibrahim was still quite steady, and grumbled out:—

"You are a set of lazy, greedy dogs. Slaves of the infidels, open quickly," and the cantankerous whine which ended this was really a triumph of art.

The door was opened a little wider, and quick as thought the young man flung himself against the doorpost, so that the door could not again be shut. At the same moment out sprang Hugh from his hiding-place, and followed by all four he rushed into the court.

The enemy were fairly taken by surprise; and though some heavy blows were dealt, yet the resistance was nothing to what it would have been had they been warned.

Hugh soon got past to the inside door, that no one had had time to close, and into the hall where Ida was sitting.

Here was the hardest fight of all. Abdulla was inside, and he was not a man to yield without a struggle. Blows fell fast and heavy; many pistol shots were exchanged. Ida's impression was that no one could possibly be left alive after all that. Hunamān, seizing a weapon, joined the rescuing party, adding one to their number, and though after his former troubles he had not much force left, yet he made considerable demonstration. The coolies, in the corner, remembering the Hindustani saying, "In a noise there is great benefit," lent their voices lustily to the *melee*.

But over and above the clatter and show it was real deadly work. Three men lay dead or dying on the floor, and then the defenders seemed to have had enough of it; for the rest, with one accord, decamped,—all but Ida's woman-friend, who was bending over

one of the fallen men, with a low wail of grief.

Then Hugh went to Ida. "Are you unhurt?" he said,

"Yes, safe enough. But this is dreadful, Hugh; are you not hit?" she said.

"I am all right, but I must go and see that none of these fellows are lurking about the place."

And first looking at the fallen men, and satisfying himself that they could not do much in his absence, he took Ibrahim with him to search the house. From the roof to the outer gate not a soul they found. After bolting the outer doors, and posting a sentry as a necessary measure of precaution, Hugh returned to the big hall to Ida, who was now beginning to realise all that had passed since that first shot in the road, and stood trembling waiting for him.

The revulsion of feeling of safety after despair was very strong, and as he approached, saying,—“The house is ours now,” her brain

became confused, and she held out her arms to him, so utterly scared that he thought she would faint.

He must get her out of this. With the presence of death, and the smell of blood it was no place for her.

His round of search had given him knowledge of the shape of the house. So he carried her out to the courtyard, and then up a double flight of steps to the roof, where she would have fresh air, and no more frightful sights and sounds.

Then he laid her down tenderly, chafing her hands. She could not speak for a time, but lay quite quiet looking at him, as he gave her a hurried account of the wonderful good fortune that had enabled him to come to her help.

"At last, when I knew you were here," he ended, "I don't know how we could have got in, but for a young sowar who was with me, who imitated the bullying whine of a Mussulman fakir to perfection."



"But how were you on the road at all?" she asked.

"Because I knew you were there," he answered; "but I had duty that took me as far as Haishki, so there was nothing very wonderful about it."

"What is to be done next?" she said; her mind still only able to grasp simple facts.

"I hardly know," he answered. "We must get out of this before long. It will soon now be daylight; perhaps we had better wait for that. I will send for the horses, and tell the men to get a little rest, and look to their prisoners. By the way, have you men for your doolie?"

"I think not; there are three. I know Hunamān helped to carry me here, but he has a bad wound on one arm."

"Well, we will see if we can get hold of any of the bearers; if we can't, could you ride Rapid on my saddle?"

"I dare say I could if I tried," she answered.

"Very well," and he rose to go and make arrangements.

"Hugh," she said, sitting.

"What is it?"

"Are all those people dead in the hall below?"

"No; one is, but two are only wounded, and the woman is all right," he said.

"I should not like them to come to harm for me, worse than has happened."

"It is not a thing to forgive," he replied. "I fancy we ought to take them on as prisoners if we can."

"Oh, do save that woman and her husband," she pleaded. "She was very good to me her own way. Could you not let them escape? I have had enough of horrors," she added shudderingly.

"I will see; only keep quiet, dear," he said. "I will come back when I have arranged for our departure."

He ran down the steep steps leading to the roof, and stumbled over Hunamān, who

was crouching at the foot of them to be as near his mistress as possible. An exclamation of impatience burst from his lips ; the man reminded him of Craven, whom Hugh had chosen to forget, and had quite easily forgotten in his night's excitement.

He passed into the long hall after having satisfied himself that it would be a cruelty to make Hunamān carry the doolie for the twelve or thirteen miles that still lay between them and Hoti Murdan. He dispatched Ibrahim and one policeman for the horses, and another to search the ravines for doolie-bearers, hinting that if none were forthcoming he would have to help in the carrying. He knew that he was giving the man a very strong motive to produce bearers, and did not doubt that one or two at least would be found. He then, in company with the young Patan, went to look at the prisoners. One was dead, whom the young man pronounced to be the well known Abdulla. "Vengeance for the bear," he said.

The second was badly wounded, and would probably not live. The least hurt happily was the husband of the woman for whom Ida had pleaded. So Hugh decided to leave the house unwatched, and when Craven sent to search the place, as he probably would do that day, he would find only the dead bodies for an evidence of his share in the business. The other pair would certainly convey themselves safe away, as soon as the coast was clear. "Craven won't like it," he thought; "but I don't see that I of all men am bound to bother myself about what he likes."

Now that all the terrible anxiety was over, and the fierce excitement of difficulty and hard blows had given place to a glow of triumph, Hugh's thoughts soon got back to the fact that he and Ida had been thus almost miraculously thrown together again. Why had it been so? Was it not the outward expression of the inward fact that they two could not part? They had tried honestly (so he put it to himself), and it

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was not to be—it was a simple impossibility.

He felt sure that she loved him, and had been running away from him. Could he not persuade her that it was no use,—that their lives were meant to go together, spite of the stupid and blundering laws of men? The excitement of war now passed into a rush of passion that entirely mastered him, and seemed as if it must conquer everything. He chose to believe that this matter was beyond question now, that surely no power was left with either of them to fight against it.

He stood at the courtyard gate, looking out into the open country, waiting to see if the horses were safe. It seemed to him that the world was surely wide and lonely enough to hold them together, and far from the eyes and tongues of the ignorant and uncharitable. No one could know what this love was. It had become the great force of his life; he had striven with all his strength to conquer it or at least to silence it. It was useless : all

effort was vain against this mighty flood ; therefore—he went on, manlike believing that argument drawn from his own experience, and cogent to him, must naturally be fully sufficient for any one else—therefore it was useless ; they were clearly beyond the ordinary pale of social judgment ; there must be a higher right in being true to each other than in obeying these wretched regulations of men.

This was surely the highest. What was there on the other side but the small calculation of prudence, and pitiful subjection to worldly standards, as wantonly unjust as they were debasingly low. Such was the sophistry of passion : quite argument enough for him, and he did not think for her. Thus after directing the horses to be watered and cared for, and telling his men to smoke and rest, he again mounted the stairs with a succession of bounds, with the feeling that the game was nearly won, that Ida was his after all.

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She had been looking out to the wild country and up to the now fading stars, for the first streaks of dawn were showing. So much had happened of late; her own identity seemed somewhat lost in all this action within and without her. She had been in danger; she had looked on at death. It had all removed her a long way from herself of yesterday; but more than all, her heart was filled with the happiness of having seen Hugh again, and that he still was near. "Surely they need not part for ever after this," was her thought too; but it was as an impression that this brave deed of Hugh's had in some sort abolished that past that had made it necessary never again to see him or speak to him. Her thoughts were in a whirl, but she felt wildly and unconscionably happy, and there he was again beside her.

She was sitting on the ground, or rather roof, with her arm and hand resting on the low parapet about a foot high.

Hugh sat down beside her, with his back to the wall so that he could see her face by turning but was actually not looking at her.

What had appeared such entirely cogent argument down in the court, seemed less certain here, and he did not care to look into her eyes.

Neither spoke for some moments, but the time was too precious to be wasted; he must break the silence.

"We have met again," he said.

"Yes; it is very strange. I have so much to thank you for. It was a horrible position to be in; yet I did not understand it a bit till you came. I shall never forget your voice. How long have we to stay here?" she asked, with a feeling that this was happiness that could not last long.

"As soon as it is a little lighter we had best get off," he answered; "though we are safe enough here now."

"I suppose we must," she said. "Arthur



may be anxious about me. No ; by the bye he does not know that I left Peshawur, but still he may be leaving Murdan, and I wanted to see him;" and it struck her that all that was so far past that she hardly believed it now.

"You are not going to Hoti Murdan I trust," he said.

"What do you mean Hugh?"

"I mean, Ida," he said, turning towards her, and lifting the hand that lay on the parapet, and resting his cheek against it, and speaking in a low hurried voice, "that we have tried to part, and have not succeeded; we cannot try again. You are mine now; I have won you, and I will keep you;" and then he looked up to her fierce and triumphant, very unlike her kindly friend of the past weeks, or even the hopeless lover of yesterday; but still it was Hugh, who had come to be so much to her, whom she loved. Could this that he was saying be in any possible sense true? She was sorely

bewildered; the events of the last few hours had much upset all her ordinary mental stock, and nervous excitement had taken from her all power of dissimulation. The sense of being parted from him had been felt as a kind of dying; his reappearance had been sweet beyond the sweetness of safety or of life: could this that he said in any possible sense be true? He saw that she had no answer to give, and thought the battle must be won; he drew her to him, and her head drooped on his shoulder.

"Darling, darling!" he murmured, "say that you love me."

"Yes; I love you, Hugh," she answered, speaking truth perforce. It was impossible to do anything else at that moment. She knew it was true; she was not cool enough to have even the dimmest notion of consequences.

"Then you are really mine for ever." He said the words tenderly; "my own, nothing can part us now;" trying to nerve himself

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for the baser side of the question that he knew was there to come.

A man may tell a woman, however guarded by duty, that he loves her, and he may be made indescribably happy by an expression of love in return, and still manage to think not ill of himself; but he must always feel much of a brute and a coward when he asks her to go away with him from all that makes her life worth having, and break once and for ever with purity, honour, and good report among men.

"Then, darling," he said, after a pause, "we have no time to lose. Are you ready for the forty miles before us?"

"Forty miles!" she said, trying to see what he could possibly mean by that.

"Yes; to Attock. We must go there first," he answered.

She raised her head slowly, and with one hand against his shoulder, held herself back so that she could see his face.

"You mean — me — to run away from

Arthur—with you?" she said, speaking the words slowly and with cruel distinctness, in the hope that he would contradict them, with a feeling of scorn that the thought of his love had had no power to bring up, nor had now any power to soften.

He rather dimly felt this, but trusted to overcome it, or at least her resistance.

He went on, "I mean that our lives must go together now. You are mine, not Arthur Craven's. No wretched human laws can be anything against the true bond that unites us. It is no use to try to be disloyal to it; you cannot. I have suffered much, Ida, and would have gone away to fight it out alone if you had loved your husband. As it is you are mine; you cannot go back to him, and pretend to be his wife. No sin could be so utterly base as such sham duty-doing just for outside show and safety's sake."

He spoke passionately, and the thought of the baseness of acting right for safety's sake found an answering cord in her own

heart; but yet, she felt his words involved a falsehood. It might seem truth to him, but to her, she knew, that no love or passion, no possible pleasing of self or seeking of outside happiness, could weigh for one moment with the obeying of laws, whoever had made them, that commanded a pure life, a clear conscience, a respect for facts, and other people's rights. She said after a little pause, in which Hugh hoped he had gained ground,—

“No, Hugh; no. There can be no truth in falsehood. One can as little unlive one's life as unsay one's words. I have lived Arthur's wife for years. I am his wife still, whatever it may be worth to him. That is the fact that matters most. That I love you is only a personal sorrow; it must die or I must die. There could be no hope of blessing in it.”

Hugh still could not see that his chance was gone.

“I do not care if it is blessed or not,” he said; “your love with a curse would be a

paradise to me. If it were only words, Ida, I might like to say such words as those, but there are the weary years before us, that we have got to get through somehow. We cannot live those years apart. True love is rare and precious; if we fling this away, what have either of us to look for but just blank desolation. Ida, dear, it is no use; we cannot part; we will live our lives together with such love as will make the world seem nothing to us, darling; it is the only right for us now,—it is the highest law of all.”

It was a fearfully strong thing this love, her own, as much as his, pleading for its life. She doubted if anything in the world or out of it was worth as much; but still she, Ida, could not do this thing. Had she been a weaker woman, or had she not loved the man, she might have yielded with the sort of moved pity that has wrecked more lives than we know of; but as it was, she was quite resolute not to mar his life or stain her own.

“No, Hugh; I have been very weak and

selfish," she said. "I have done harm enough. If I were a better woman I might be good enough to see the higher law you speak of; but I cannot. I must live by the light I see."

She raised her head a little proudly as she spoke, and took out her little pistol from her bosom, and looked at it with a strange smile; and went on,—

"I have more than once to-night thought I had better send a bullet through my head. Maybe I had best do so still. I have told you the truth, Hugh: I love you, but I will not do as you say. I will put myself safe to death sooner."

"It might be best for us both," he said bitterly. "But what do you mean us to do?"

"I shall go to my husband, and tell him the whole story. He is just and true; maybe he will have pity on me; and let me try and do my duty. You, Hugh, have your career: it will be a bright one, and you will thank

me in your heart some day for not having marred it for you."

He would have spoken again, but she stopped him.

"No, Hugh,—dear Hugh,—there is nothing more to be said; no words can be any possible good. Let us end this somehow, and get away to Murdan." And seeing he still hesitated, she added,—

"For my sake, go."

And then he rose, and turned from her so white and hopeless, that she wished rather that she had won her victory by a pistol shot, than she should thus have to keep quiet and witness it.

She buried her face in her hands with a sort of passionate choke, that ended in a moan of pain. "O God!" she said aloud, when he had left the roof; "there are some things past bearing. May I not die yet!"

How long this lasted she did not know, nor ever after did she know how near she had been to a violent death by her own hand.



Some time after she was roused by Hunamān, who came, sent by Hugh, to tell her all was ready.

She rose, and followed him mechanically down the stairs. Standing at the door of the hall was the woman, with the child in her arms. The child smiled at her, and she kissed it; the unconscious baby smile helped her strangely. She gave her hand to the woman, wondering how long it was since she had sat beside her a prisoner.

She was thankful to see the doolie ready. The policemen had found some bearers, and she was very glad of the rest and quiet of the little box.

They turned gently out of the gate, leaving the place to the woman and her husband, who were safe to cross the border before the day was much older.

The little procession had very greatly the air of a funeral as it went slowly along,—Hugh and Ibrahim in front, Hunamān on foot at one side, and the policemen bringing

up the rear: in considerable terror these two as to how their conduct might be viewed by the commissioner.

So they went on slowly, but without halts. No word was uttered; there was nothing left to say.

At last Murdan was reached, and they saw a group of white tents on the Guides' parade ground, that they both knew must be Arthur's camp.

Hugh stopped the bearers, threw himself off Rapid, and stood beside her.

"I am going now," he said.

"Thank you," she said, and held out her hand.

He held it an instant to his lips, and the next moment was again on Rapid's back, and, motioning to the trooper to follow, was off and out of sight before she had reached the door of the largest of the white tents.

## CHAPTER X.

### *SAFETY.*

WITHOUT the faintest suspicion of what was happening to his young wife, Colonel Craven's thoughts had been a good deal occupied with her ; or, if that does not well describe it, for actually his mind had been given throughout the day of Friday to, if possible, a more than usual diversity of subjects, yet there had been present, through it all, an impression of some other care that was less imperative and yet mattered more than these outside ones ; and at last, dismissing some work that could be made to wait till the morrow, he rode into Murdan, that he might have time to do all in his power to arrange for Ida's comfort at Murree before the post went out.

He wrote to the house agent there, saying that a house must be found for Monday

or Tuesday, giving considerable directions as to Mrs. Craven's requirements, and *carte blanche* as to the cost.

Then he wrote to an old friend who was attached to the Punjāb general staff, asking him to look after the said agent, and to see that a place fit for an invalid was ready by the time fixed, Monday; begging him for old friendship's sake to exert himself in the matter, making rather more, as he wrote of his wife's illness, than he had data for,—that things might be better done, and she have less trouble when she got there; and lastly asking him to give information to Mrs. Maxwell at Nutwood Lodge, of all that had been done. This done, a line was written to Johnson, asking him to see to the *dāk*, sending up servants, and the rest of it; and lastly a few words to Ida, as follows,—

“DEAR IDA,—

“I trust you have had no more fever. You will understand that you could not

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come here now. If you leave Peshawur tomorrow, you should be in Murree by mid-day on Monday, taking the journey up the hill half by night and the rest on Monday morning. Go straight to Mrs. Maxwell's; she will know you are coming, and also what arrangements have been made for you. I have no doubt that Dr. Mansell and the house agent between them will find you a house, though all Murree houses are bad. I have written to Johnson. Don't hesitate to make use of people. I wish I could be with you.

"Yours ever,

"ARTHUR CRAVEN."

When he had written and sent this, he became conscious that that was not what was wanted, and calculated if it were not possible to ride into Peshawur and back before morning, and really see with his own eyes what was the matter. If there was nothing wrong but fever, doubtless he was

doing the best he could; but all Ida's late letters, as he thought of them, seemed to indicate some queer state of depression rather than actual illness. Without any notion what else to do, he felt that he was blundering, and that such elaborate arrangements as he had made were *de trop*. Could he not see her? But he was obliged to decide that he must not, for at any moment news might be brought demanding immediate action, he could not leave his post.

But, though he had made sure that no matter that he could arrange for at a distance should be wanting for here, he felt greatly discontented. He turned to work again, and after writing half the night, he threw himself on his bed for a few hours' sleep, just as Ida was crossing the Cabul River, without any misgivings as to her whereabouts.

Five o'clock saw him in the saddle again, with the engineer officer of the district, deep in a discussion of how a mule-track, running from Murdan towards the hills, could most

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rapidly be turned into a good road, passable at need by wheeled vehicles; for it might at any moment be necessary, when the force was in the field, to draw on Peshawur, though all ordinary supplies would come from the south.

This over, and a good deal more of the kind, Craven returned to his camp to an early breakfast, and a few hours' more of writing, after which he would have to ride off to Permouli, where the troops of the expedition would soon now have to gather.

It seemed almost decided that the entrance into the enemies' country was to be effected by the pass of Umbeyla. For this the military arguments were irreproachable, though there were some very important political questions that had not found definite answers, that might not unlikely reverse these conclusions, based as these were upon diligent study of maps, backed up by splendid applications of the art of war.

The maps had much ignored the inhabit-

ants of the land they described ; the British feeling of their students was in favour of a like course.

Craven was quite willing to see the cogency of their arguments, but was less sure that the Bonairs, the large clan whose lands lay along the one side of the pass, would see the matter from our point of view. And Saadut Khan, in whose judgment and knowledge of the temper of the people of these wilds he had great confidence, spoke very strongly against it, as a very serious risk, and scouted the notion of a soothing proclamation as a device worthy of a Bengal civilian, and of the *naïveté* of these oddly truthful English, but utterly inappropriate to the work on hand.

When his breakfast was over, Colonel Craven was joined by Saadut Khan, who had heard some dim rumours brought to the bazaar by a runaway bearer, concerning Mrs. Craven and robbers on the Peshawur road ; the story ran that she had been



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carried off to the hills. Saadut felt sure that there must be some measure of truth in it, but was disposed to wait for more definite tidings before alarming his friend. He went then to his tent, and finding that Arthur had heard nothing as yet, he held his peace, but stayed with him for a time. If a great trouble was to come, might he not be of some use. The sight of Hugh and Ida that late morning at Peshawur, and the air of evident embarrassment worn by them both, had struck him, and impressed him unfavourably; and he thought that if this report was confirmed, and Arthur Craven's wife had really been carried off, he would like to know where the cavalry adjutant was.

Colonel Craven would have been glad to be left alone to his writing, but still Saadut stayed. An hour passed, but no tidings; and he felt doubtful if he had not better speak of what he had heard, even at the risk of alarming his friend uselessly. Conversation turned on the minister of the young chief

of Umb, in whom Arthur was anxious to place as much confidence as possible, as the best means of keeping him loyal, and of whom he on the whole thought well. In answer to some remarks of his, Saadut said, the thought of Ida foremost in his mind,—

“Yes; he is able, well-mannered, and well-meaning; but he is unstable as a woman. You never know what he will do next.”

Hardly were the words out of his lips, when Ida stood in the doorway. Arthur was lying on his back on his bed, and Saadut was seated beside him; and it was on the grave face of the Patan that her eyes first fell.

Craven saw the expression on his friend's face,—between the formal courtesy with which he always greeted strangers and ladies, and an air of utter surprise. He jumped up, and looked round.

“Good heavens, Ida! what has brought you here?” he said.

The presence of Saadut acted as a check. "I told you that I wanted to see you," she said hesitatingly, "and thought it best to come."

Saadut felt assured that something serious had happened, and wondered if the truth would be reached by Arthur. He must get out of the way at any rate; so he greeted her with an air of composure, and left the tent, and Arthur and Ida were left alone.

The contrast between the husband and wife was at that moment very marked, and was not to Ida's advantage. Arthur looked old and careworn. The responsibility that he carried so bravely had marked him. He was greyer and thinner than when they had parted; but he was not a man to be slovenly under any pressure of work or care, and stood there in his grey clothes and snowy linen, spotlessly clean, well kept, as always a fastidious gentleman, looking with some astonishment at this very remarkable apparition before him. She was fearfully dirty.

She had left home in white clothes ; they had been in strange places, and bore full trace of them, and besides were spotted and smeared with blood. Dirty, dishevelled, blood-stained, timid, and bewildered, she looked unattractive and very childish.

She, who had been a woman all night, bearing herself bravely enough, now was a child again there under Arthur's eyes. It seemed doubtful how what she had come to say would be said.

"What does it all mean, Ida?" he asked hastily. "What has happened?"

Happily for her she was very far spent physically, and as she tried to find words the tent seemed to reel, and she grasped a table to support herself, and looked wildly at him,—

"What is it, Ida?" he asked again, more gently.

"I left Peshawur last night," she said, "and was attacked on the road, and carried off to a house. One of the bearers was killed, and Hunamān was wounded. But at last

Hugh Linwood came, and set me free, and brought me here," and she sank to the ground; she could not stand and talk.

"My child, I have you safe," he said. "You are not hurt."

He took her in his arms, and laid her on his bed; and sitting beside her, tried with soothing words to get her so far tranquilized as to tell him what it really was that had happened to her.

For the moment it helped her on that he was so good to her, and she laid her head down, feeling very dirty, and very thankful. It could only last a little while, but still it helped her for the time; strength must be got somehow for what was behind.

She gradually told him all about her journey, the attack, and the rescue—just the bare facts—with quite childlike simplicity.

Arthur marvelled at the story. It did not explain what mattered most, why she had come at all. Though he was thankful for her safety, he felt vexed that she should have

been exposed to all that had happened, and to the risks behind of what had only not happened by good fortune; and then came the feeling of irritation that Linwood should have been the hero of the affair.

"You must rest now, child," he said at last. "You have had a narrow escape from the worst consequences of your folly."

This helped her more than kindness. The harsh word roused and stung her. There had been folly enough, but that was not it.

She raised her head with a look that was almost defiance. "I cannot rest," she said. "That is just what I must not do. I have been foolish enough; but my coming here was in no sense a folly, Arthur. I came because I had something to tell you."

"It might have waited, or you could have written," he answered, noticing the change in her manner.

"I could not write it, and it could not wait," she said.

He thought her brain was turning, yet her manner was cool enough, though utterly unlike anything he had ever seen before. There was a something of steady despair in her tone. He did not answer. A strange smile passed over her face, and she said,—

“What would you say Arthur, if I told you that I had been untrue to you?”

“That you were talking frightful nonsense.”

Arthur said this so heartily, that Ida felt more crushed under his simple disbelief, than she would have been by any form of reproach.

She left the bed, and sat down at his feet; it was the right place for her.

“I wish it were,” she said, in such a tone of emotion as told him that there was something behind this; but yet he felt more pity than curiosity.

“Hush, Ida,” he answered; “you are over-excited now. Whatever you have to tell me had best not be said at present.”

"No; I am calm enough," she persisted with desperate earnestness; "but I shall go fairly mad unless you hear me out. Last night, when we were on the house-top, I told Hugh Linwood that I loved him."

"And you have come to tell me this, Ida!" He started up, but, touched by her strange earnest manner, he sat down again. "But it is all nonsense. Your brain is overstrained; but it is not a matter to speak carelessly about."

"I never was more sadly sane in my life. You must listen to me, or there will be no one to listen to," she said, with a something of defiance appearing again.

He had still hardly taken in the purport of her words, and what they must mean to him.

"But why did this bring you here?" he asked.

"Because you had to know it; because it was only right that you should know what your wife was."



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He was now convinced that some real crisis had come for them both, but his faith in her was too complete to believe even her own words. She had got over her childish embarrassment, and under pressure of her need, her face lit up, and her eyes flashed, as she looked up to him. He felt she was a woman at last; and more, that whatever she might say, it was utterly impossible to believe any sort of evil of her.

At this moment I think he feared what her next words might bring, more than she feared to speak them.

"Ida," he said, "if you come to me as my wife, I would rather trust you than hear confessions."

"I no longer trust myself," she said forcibly, "till I have told you all there is to tell of my acquaintance with Hugh Linwood."

He winced at the name, but it had, as Ida, with the calculation of instinct, knew it would, the effect of making him listen; and

she told him all she had come to tell :—of the boy and girl love-making, of the proposal, the engagement that was not an engagement, that she had taken so little heed of that she had never thought of unmaking it. Then of the meeting at Peshawur with Hugh, still thinking nothing of the past or of him. “There really seemed nothing to tell, or you should have had it.” How that after Colonel Stanley had spoken of it as a more serious matter, she had resolved to tell him, and had been prevented; of the long weeks of solitude and weariness, and how good Hugh had been to her, and what it had grown to. Of her feeling that as a wife she was a failure, and then the fancy that she was dying would get out of it. Then of Saadut’s coming, and the impression that forced itself on her that she must at least get out of Peshawur; her letter to him and his answer, and the interview in the verandah of the previous morning.

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"So it all came out," she said; "and I told him he must go away; and he went, and I was very miserable. I knew I must never see him again, and also that I could have no rest till I had told you about it all. It mattered more than a small risk; so I left last night to come to you. Then came this business with the robbers, and Hugh came, I don't quite know how, and then—on the roof there—spite of duty, right, and common sense, I knew I loved him, and I said so. That is all my sin, Arthur; and it is more than enough. I told him I should come and tell you. If only I could disappear from the earth, it would be best; but one does not seem to die when one wants to. And now, Arthur, what will you do with me?"

And the courage that had upheld her so far having spent itself, she laid her head down at his feet.

It was not an ordinary story to be told straight out to a husband, and Arthur

Craven would not have been mortal if he had not felt stung and wounded—savage, too, at the man who had been the cause of all this; but the honesty and loyalty of the tale, and the appeal, disarmed him, even brought a strong admiration for her courage, and a feeling of pity.

He did not speak at once; at last he said,—

“I should have taken better care of you, Ida. It has been hard for you.”

“Don’t be kind to me, Arthur,” she said, feeling that there would be some comfort in harder words. “I know you must despise me.”

“That I do not at all,” he said. “Thank God you have had the courage to tell me all this. You were right; but I don’t see how you found it out.”


“Don’t talk about right, Arthur,” she went on. “The whole world seems thick with wrong. It is miserable all ways, to be the fool I am, and then to come worrying you with this; but I could not live on

unless you knew it. I came to you because something stronger than myself said 'go,' but I had my little pistol in case I lost heart. What will you do with me?"

"Do with you!" he answered; the rub of the whole thing lay in the future, and he must think of that. "I hardly think there is much left for me to do. I shall leave you quite free. I can trust you not to disgrace yourself or me, and I have no wish to ask for more. We will act no lies with our eyes open, Ida."

"I don't want to be free," she said. "It is the thought of you that has made anything possible so far. Will you not help me still, and let me try to do my duty?"

"I think we have had enough of trying and duty doing," he said, feeling that this matter could not be patched up—that it was too vital to be remedied by any words. "I am exacting, Ida, and as proud as you are. I will not take as duty what is only worth having for love's sake."



"It must be as you judge best; but we have got to live out our lives somehow," she said.

"Yes, Ida; but we cannot live at fever heat. Whatever there is in the tie between us must be real, or it will not hold. At least we must be honest to each other now."

"It does not seem to me that a tie is wanting," she said, wondering what he meant. "I have given you my life, such as it is,—my unsatisfactory self."

"You have given me nothing, dear," he said sadly, "that was worth the having. I do not blame you; nay, I am very sad for you. This outside bond is very strong, though it is very little to the purpose. Still it must mean something real, or we had best part."

"Part, Arthur!" she echoed the word, and looked up at him.


"I think so; it will be best for both. What you have said must alter our relations to each other. We shall only make matters worse if we pretend it has not. It

is very sad," he said, and though he looked firm and steady, yet there was an expression of pain in his face that made Ida's heart ache.

"It has come on me so suddenly," he added, wondering at her look of trouble. "I do not see my way. We must part at any rate for a time, and I dare say it is best that it should be so. I must see this frontier business through: the force will start in a fortnight now. There is stiff work before us. You shall go to Murree, and if I come out of it alive, we can then decide what is right and best."

She stood up determined that this must end. The pain on his face seemed more than all she had seen and suffered so far.

"Very well, Arthur," she said steadily. "I will submit to your judgment, whatever it may be. Don't think much about me. I am more heartily sick of myself than I can say, and more grieved for you than anything else. I have been the wrong sort of wife



for you all through. I have seen it, and tried hard and honestly to make myself right; but nothing has come of my trying but worse puzzle and misery. You wanted a reasonable woman, I have been a child, and a foolish one. You have had greatly the worst of it every way. I am very glad that there is daylight between us—that you know the truth; and whatever is the end of this, I will promise that you shall have no moans from me. “But for the present,” she added; “what are your plans for to-day?”

“I have to meet the chief engineer at Permouli, about twenty-five miles away, this evening, but you can stay here a day or two if you like.”

“No. I would soonest get to Murree,” she answered. “You have written about a house, have you not? I have no luggage. It was taken with me, and we had not men enough to bring it on. Can I get native clothes, and soap and water? and I will be ready to start any time after it gets cooler.”



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It was a trying day for them both ; physical exhaustion returned when the excitement was over, which was fortunate for Ida. She was nearly worn out, and lay on Arthur's bed watching him as he wrote. He worked away steadily, and did not speak; and though he threw all he could of himself into his work, there was much left for thought and suffering and consciousness of her presence. It was a relief to them both when they parted, Ida guarded by a half a dozen Guides across country, for Attock and Pindee, and Arthur on his way to Permouli.

Saadut Khan, who accompanied him part of the way, could make very little of his friend's stern-set face and preoccupied manner, and cursed womankind, and specially that fair uncertain specimen of it, Arthur's wife, for this new look of pain that was so well guarded as to be the more pitiful.

That Arthur was perfectly brave and cool, was no proof that he was insensible. He was deeply wounded, and yet was as far from

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feeling himself injured as from being disposed to moan.

Ida's outspoken loyalty had appealed to the nobler side of a very noble nature, it had entirely disarmed him, and had even won his hearty admiration. Though he had entirely failed to understand her dreamy morbid side, he could well appreciate this bold step of hers. That she did not love him, that she loved some one else, were to him so many facts regrettable but not blameworthy, though he was the loser by them. So long as there was daylight between them, he had no cause to feel himself illtreated.

When his thoughts got the length of the man Ida said she loved, then he felt angry and bitter, and doubted if the best way out of the difficulty were not after all the old world one of shooting him, or being shot, as it might happen. This was impossible, for the present at least, on account of his duties to the State. The frontier field force would need to march into those hills in a fortnight, and no

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one could well supply his place, matters being as they were. Once having decided that he could not shoot Hugh, or be shot by him, he dismissed him contemptuously ; there was no less thing that he could do. In her confession, the only thing that Ida had not told was the fact that Hugh had suggested flight,—about that it had been her feeling that it was neither Arthur's business or hers. Hugh had suggested it, she had negatived it, and there was an end of the matter. She had no blame in it, and therefore nothing to confess ; and so Arthur did not know the full extent of Linwood's sins against him.

It maddened him to think of the risks she had run of death, of captivity, and above all to have had her ears sullied with unholy love-talk. It was significant of Arthur's mind and the tenacity of his faith where once he had trusted, that he did not think of her as responsible for the movements of her own heart, hardly for what had gone on about her.

He who had wondered with some irritation when there had been indefinite vague sadness in her manner, as at the time of Mrs. Maxwell's arrival at Peshawur, and wondered more tenderly, but still without comprehension, at her outburst at their last parting, seemed to comprehend and sympathize with at once, and fully, this less ordinary line of proceeding.

All that was in Ida's hands was faith and loyalty, and in that, thank God, she had not failed. It may be doubted if ever he had loved as much as he did then. And as he rode towards Permouli thinking of her as she sat on the ground at his feet, eager and defiant, with her whole soul flashing from her eyes, strong in her sorrow and her fearless candour, the hope came back to him, why should he not yet win her love, spite of Hugh and the fact that he had become her husband without it.

He saw, for he reviewed their married life from the first, that what had done most to mar it so far had been Ida's impression, for

which he was doubtless to some extent responsible, that she was not the right sort of wife for him, and that she must make herself something other to what she was for his sake. He thought of her in the days of their rides at Sandford, so bright, able, and self-reliant ; the words of to-day were almost the first he had heard since their marriage that were really in keeping with that side of her. He thought of her in their honeymoon among his people, morbid and out of tune : that was beginning to train herself. Then, of the early time in India, nice but characterless : that was discipline. And now love and the strain of difficult circumstances had brought out nature, and she was again herself,—no longer a child but a fearless true-hearted woman, into whose clear soul he could see as he had seemed to do at first.

What was to be the end of it ? he asked himself without seeing his way to any very hopeful answer. Did this confession of hers oblige them to part. It looked very like it,

notwithstanding her wish expressed to do her duty to him. No; that had been the error all through: a striving to do and be something that was not spontaneous. With that he felt he never could be satisfied again, and might become distrustful, jealous, and suspicious, and so make their joint life more perfectly intolerable than it could be apart.

In an outside sense it would be hard for her, for what was she to do with herself alone; but it might be possible through Mrs Bygrave, to plan for her some life that she would care to live; and it would at any rate be better than striving after impossibilities. He might at a distance and out of sight do more to make her happy than he could do near.

For himself, he never doubted that what was best for her, could be made to do for him. In an affair like the one before him perhaps some chance shot might knock him over, and leave Ida free, and it would be well so; but it was a commonplace ending

to the story to which he felt hardly inclined ; but rather he found himself believing in a future, when this other feeling should have died away for lack of food. She was young ; there should be no acting between them for the present. May be for a long while they must live apart ; but she was so honest and true-hearted, that he would have a fair chance by-and-by. He was strong and patient ; love such as his must have force in it ; the day would surely come when she would be really his own. He knew that for himself no change was possible : if they lived and died in different continents he would still love her to the end. To him the work of his life was full of interest, and meant a sort of happiness that was not incompatible with this private sorrow. Knowing all this, that life had other things in it, that above love was truth and faithfulness, yet the flame burnt strong and steady ; some miracle would work in its behalf, and he would win at last.

So he rode into Permouli, full of thought,

and very sorrowful; but he loved too well to be hopeless.

Once arrived there the outside world resumed its claims, and no one would have known that Colonel Craven had any weight of private trouble, or that he had any powers of mind or body not at their stretch in the service of the State.



## CHAPTER XI.

### *WORN OUT.*

IDA had gone through too much of emotion and fatigue to be able, as the doolie carried her towards Rawul Pindee, to think much at all. She did not sleep, but she was exhausted and bewildered to such a degree, as to have very little notion of what had passed and how it was to affect her life. Two points, like rocks in a stormy sea, poked themselves up through the surging waves of thought. One, and this was an unutterable comfort to her, that she had told the truth both to Hugh and to Arthur,—that all was clear and open whatever else it might be. Next, that Arthur's faithfulness, that wanted not her but what was right and best, was a much finer thing and had more in it than Hugh's passion, pleading for love at any cost; and this without any wish to go back

from the words that were, to her sorrow, too bitterly true, she travelled on that Saturday night entirely sleepless, but without power enough in her mind to do more than go over, again and again, the deeds and words of the previous night and morning.

At Rawul Pindée, she spent Sunday, looking dreamily out into the dāk bungalow compound, with an impatient wonder that outside things should look so tame, when life and the souls of men were what they were.

In the afternoon she started again, and reached the half-way bungalow Trate up in the hill-country, where she was supposed to sleep. But sleep seemed to have left her eyes; still unreasoningly did her thoughts revolve round and round the past, and it was only on leaving Trate the next morning very early, that the cool fresh mountain air seemed to wake up in her the knowledge, that besides a past there was a present. Of the future she was still utterly disregardless.

Where was she going? what was she about? She was going at once to Mrs. Maxwell's; that was arranged for her. It was odd that she should be fitting into Arthur's plans, which had been made under such different circumstances. Of what had passed how much must Mary know? Not the personal part; no words of that should ever pass her lips. Should she omit all mention of having gone round by Murdan? That would not do, for her servants would talk, and Mary would then need no telling that there was something wrong, involving Hugh and Arthur. No; she must make up her mind to talk of her fright, capture, and escape, as a big thing by itself; but as it seemed to her a very little thing beside the other matters that had accompanied it, she decided that she would speak as frankly as she could, tell all she intended, and calmly ignore all she did not mean to tell; and if Mary did make shrewd guesses, as was her wont, well, the world would not come to an end for that.

She would be glad to get to her own house as soon as she could, but otherwise, seeing that she had lived through these few days past, nothing could now come to her that she could not get through still.

Mary Maxwell received her warmly, and was more than a little shocked at her appearance; but there was quite enough of the known, fever, fatigue, fear, and now sleeplessness, to account for her looks.

A house had been found for her in rather a lonely out-of-the-way part of the station, perched on the top of one of the many little green or wooded knolls on which Murree is built, and Mrs. Maxwell was very anxious that she should stay with her to be nursed, rather than go to this hill top to be again overmuch alone. On this point Ida was very decided. She could not rest, she said, unless she was on her own ground; and as she certainly looked ill and was very restless, Mary gave way, though feeling really more alarmed for her than

there was for the present quite reason for. It struck her that all this sounded strange, Ida's hurried journey to Murdan, the fighting by the way, the evidently overwrought state of mind she was in, and now her determination to be alone; but still it all hung together pretty well, and Ida was so really ill, that she did not for some time suspect Hugh of being concerned in the matter, in any other capacity than that of hero. She greatly regretted that Ida should be so much out of the way, as with her many employments it would not be easy to look after her as she would wish.

Ida was greatly relieved to find herself on her own ground again, as she called it. She needed to be free and alone, and felt utterly incapable of keeping up under any observant eyes for more than a couple of days at a time. She first tried household activity; busied herself in arranging her house, walked a great many more miles and up and down steeper hills than she was fit for, tried

many devices to damp in some degree the raised, strained, restless spirit within her,—but nothing seemed to have the effect of filling her mind sufficiently to take it off the events of that fatal thirty hours; nothing tired her enough to give her the power of resting, and she could not sleep at all.

Of course this could not last long; in a few days the Peshawur fever, of which she had not after all had much in the valley, swooped down upon her with great strength, and she was really in serious danger. It took such vigorous hold of her, that but for her naturally strong constitution she must soon have sunk under it, but it did assume the proportions of a fight for life. Dr. Mansell, Arthur's friend, was very good to her. It was not a rare thing for fever bred within the Peshawur valley to develop itself after the patient had left it; and Murree for some reasons seemed a favourable place for such development; but he had not often seen it as severe as it was in her case. He would

have liked to write and inform Colonel Craven of her state; but this was the only point on which she had any will of her own. She said that as he must not now leave his post for anything,—the force had begun its advance by the time she was at the worst,—and had more than enough of care and worry, it was not fair to give him any that could be spared. She promised not to ignore the matter entirely in her letters (she did not say how few they were) if Dr. Mansell would not write at all. To Mary she said the same thing. “He cannot come now; why worry him with this?” And when Mary pressed the matter further, and said, “But, my dear, it may be that you will die, and then it would be very hard for him;” she only answered, “I think I know best. I have thought of all that. If I die it must be a shock to him; it is no use giving him a preliminary fright as well.”

It struck Mary very much at this time, the coolness with which Ida spoke of death.

It was not irreverence or any ignoring of the unseen, for though it was not a matter on which either of them spoke readily, yet small things indicated that the beliefs and hopes of beyond the world were influencing Ida very strongly. But she spoke of death as a familiar thing, as one of the quite common thoughts in her mind, and which was a thing to be rather desired than feared. And this to Mary, happy and busy, with strong human interests, and stronger human ties, sounded very sad and somewhat shocking.

Perhaps the hardest part of Ida's task just then was writing to Arthur. She did very little of it, choosing the moment when she was at her strongest that he might not read her illness in her handwriting. He wrote rarely and shortly, as if feeling the difficulty of it too, telling her when he wrote of his doings and of public matters, never once alluding to their last meeting, and all the matters that lay so heavy on Ida's heart,



and she had to answer common-places by common-places. She told him she had had fever since she had been there, but gave no details, feeling all the time that she would have given worlds for one hour of his presence. It seemed she could neither die nor live without his forgiveness, and that was what she could not get, even at the very last extremity. So she passed days between life and death. Mary was very good to her, but could help her very little; she could not fathom what was the matter,—she could in no way have helped her if she had.

Sometimes Ida's thoughts went back to Peshawur, and Hugh, with his thoughtful kindness and his handsome bright face; but between now and then, like a wall, rose the remembrance of that half hour in the grey dawn on the house-top, and she put away all thought of him with less of an effort than was quite consistent and fair. The Hugh she had loved seemed to have faded

a little, and to have given place to the impression of an abyss, into which she only had not fallen by some outside power stronger than herself which had saved her. But really except by snatches she thought very little at all at this time: she was unconscious for a good deal of her time, and for the rest alternating between over-excitement and exhaustion, and it was only at some of the half-way stages that her mind would work.

The force was gathered at Permouli by the middle of the month, rather later than had been at first planned, and did not make its first march into the enemies' country till the 20th. In a few days much that had been heretofore conjecture, was found to be serious fact, and many pleasant expectations were swept clean out of the minds that had fostered them. The road was found to be difficult, quite beyond all calculation, the effect of the soothing proclamation was absolutely *nil*, and the important

tribe of the Bonairs, on whose neutrality we had chosen to count, at once commenced hostile action against us.

Within a week from the time the expedition started, it was known at Murree that the work in the hills was likely to be a very different matter from the military promenade that had been anticipated by the sanguine; that really tough work was to be done; and that the powers of all employed would be strained to the uttermost. And the first thing that did Ida any good was the knowledge that her husband was in a position of difficulty and danger immensely greater than anything that could have been foreseen when they had last met.

Her illness was at its worst, and Dr. Mansell had come to the conclusion that there was nothing more he could do. In a week or so more either the fever would wear away the young life, or it would exhaust the fever. It was an open question which would win, but things looked ill for Ida; and

so long as the world went well with Arthur, she was content it should be so.

She did not hear of his difficulties from him, but one afternoon—(she was as usual lying on a sofa in the verandah of her house, looking across a wide valley formed of clustering hill-tops to the higher hills beyond, where in particular one snow-clad sugarloaf hill attracted her,—she would lie thus watching it for hours, feeling weary or excited as it happened that the fever was on or off, but watching the far away hill-top as if it contained some hope of other life than her own)—Mrs. Maxwell came in hurriedly, and sat down beside her with a look of scared anxiety that was very unlike her. She had just heard some well authenticated news confirming all the vague rumours of ill which had been flying about for a day or two. Also that X was ordered on service, and that the women and children were to join a *dépôt* of the women of many regiments at Noushera. She had almost made up her

own mind to go to Noushera, but Ida,—and she started at once to look at her. In this matter she was determined not to spare Ida. If anything would rouse her, it would be an anxiety beyond her own immediate horizon.

“What does Colonel Craven say to all this?” she asked, omitting health inquiries as so sadly useless.

“All what?” asked Ida wearily. “I have not heard from Arthur for some days.”

“It is strange you have not heard. It is a very serious matter apparently,” replied Mary. “The roads are impassable, or the force has got on the wrong one. The Bonairs, or some such people, a very strong tribe at any rate, are against us as well as the Sittana lot. It seems that the difficulties are very great, the work doubled; altogether things are looking bad. They are sending reinforcements at once; X is to go.”

“Yes; oh, I suppose they will get on somehow,” answered Ida, still uninterested.

"If they do it will be at the cost of a great many lives," Mary continued, provoked at Ida's lack of interest.

"Yes," Ida said, as if she had not heard; "I daresay."

"One would not suppose, Ida," said Mary, thinking as she spoke that it would be worth while as an experiment to frighten her, "that your husband's life and reputation were at stake in this matter."

"Arthur's reputation! how?" asked Ida, a little awaked by a word that she knew to mean very much to her husband.

"Because in a case of disaster they always come down hard on the politicals. Wake up, dear, and think more of him. You are worse than I thought if you can't be moved by your husband's present troubles, and the no-one-knows how much more that is before him."

"I don't think there is much left of me to be moved by anything. It is of no use talking, Mary." She said this so wearily, and

it was so very evidently true, that Mrs. Maxwell felt that she had been carried away by her excitement.

"My poor child," she said, chafing her shrunken thin hand, which had got deadly cold as she held it.

Ida was at that worn stage as to be only physically susceptible.

Mrs. Maxwell stayed a little longer to tell Ida all that she knew, and spoke of her wish to go to Noushera without awaking anything like real interest or attention, and then left her, feeling that Ida was further spent than she had thought. Ida's last words sent her away with tears in her eyes.

"You see, dear, that it is a good thing that Arthur does not know about me."

"Poor girl, she was right, but it is awfully sad for them both," she said as she went. And she thought of the vigorous woman-child of two years back. She was convinced that a miracle would be needed now to save her, and looked forward to see her pass away in

a few days, and determined to sacrifice all other matters that she might be able to watch by her to the last. When she reached home she wrote a letter to Mrs. Bygrave that would, at least, prepare her for what seemed impending.

Little Hugh that evening looked in vain for his usual game of romps. His mother was out of heart. These public troubles, and X and Harry going on service, might account for it in part, but with that there came a second set of motives that went far to reconcile her. She was every inch a soldier's wife, and the thought that Harry should be kept quiet in cantonments when there was real work doing had not been very satisfactory to her, and spite of wifely, womanly, anxiety, she was glad that X should go.

But, poor Ida! it was a very sad end to that bright young life. She had a strong impression that Ida's married life had not been all it might have been, though she had no clear notion where the failure was, or who



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was responsible; but to end in this fashion! She felt all ways very sad for her young girl friend.

It took Ida a long time to realize what Mary had said; but at last the words "Arthur's life and reputation at stake" began to have some definite meaning to her as she lay there turning them over in her mind. At first they seemed incomprehensible as words in a foreign tongue; but gradually as the fever returned, and brought with it some remaining mental power, she became dimly conscious of what had happened, and what it all must mean to Arthur.

It seemed now that her mind only worked when the fever was thus coming on. At its height she became confused; when it left her, it left her blank and helpless, both in mind and body, like an extinguished lamp till the fire shall be again applied.

So it was about eight o'clock in the evening, when she had gone to bed, that at last mind, heart, everything seemed full of Arthur,

and his danger and his troubles. Dr. Mansell came, as he always did at this time, to watch how the strength of his patient was wearing. He was not quite as hopeless of her as Mrs. Maxwell was, for he had seen too many wonderful recoveries for that, and he knew too that the speciality of the Peshawur fever is rather to reduce and weaken than to kill out-right. However as time passed without improvement, he had seen that any result might be expected; and only Ida's own earnest petition had hindered him from writing his opinion to Colonel Craven. But she had promised to keep her husband informed, and Craven in writing to him of his wife as an invalid, had helped him to the impression that he knew all about her, and was aware of all that had gone on previously in the matter of her health. In spite of her own words he was sure that she had undergone some severer strain than an ordinary hot season, and a day or so of fever.



This evening he found her stronger than he had seen her for some days, but evidently under the influence of fever. She asked him eagerly of the news from the front, and he told her all he knew; he, too, feeling that it was worth while at any risk to interest her. She questioned him very eagerly as to what people were saying of Arthur, and was something comforted by his assurance that no word had been said against him; indeed it was said that the truth of his warnings was becoming more apparent by every fresh telegram.

At last when he thought her mind was very far away from herself and her illness, she said suddenly,—

“Dr. Mansell, do you think I shall die very soon?”

He had to look about him for a safe phrase.

“I don’t think you are in immediate danger,” he said, unable to speak with any real confidence of recovery.

“I mean, if I wanted to go anywhere

taking two or three days, should I be likely to die on the road?"

"Where do you want to go to?" he asked, avoiding her question still, with the usual professional tact.

"I want to go to Noushera; there is to be a depôt of women and children there; and a hospital I suppose. Now I should not be in any one's way if I should die there, but do you think I could live to reach the place? Arthur might come and see me if he wanted to there."

And in her eagerness, bright colour burnt in her cheeks, and her eyes glared and flashed; and he doubted what strength and life would be left when this attack should have passed away.

"I think you are best where you are," he said.

"Shall I not live a couple of days?" she said, in a matter-of-fact tone that grated on him, used as he was to suffering and death.

"I think you will live many days," he answered; "but I am no prophet, and you are very ill for travelling." But even as he spoke he thought that this might be one of those spontaneous efforts that at times do more to save men's lives than any external help; and he added, "If you wish it very much, and can get some one to take good care of you, you may go."

"Thank you, thank you," she said eagerly. "Will you write a line for me to Mrs. Maxwell, asking her to come to me to-morrow morning? I can't write straight now," she added, with a faint smile.

"I will see her," he answered, and soon went away; and late in the evening surprised Mary by coming abruptly into her drawing-room, as she sat, thinking, over the fire.

"I have come to ask you to take Mrs. Craven to Noushera," he said.

"She won't live to get there," answered Mary.

"She may not, but I think she will, and it is about her only chance of life. The thought is her own, and she is at that point where no prescriptions but her own are any use; I can do nothing for her. He looked savagely into the fire, for he had got to feel very kindly to his hopeless patient of late. "Great happiness or great anxiety might save her, and the latter, the Bonairs, and the rest of them across the frontier are helping her to. It is not a bad notion to go as close to the mischief as possible."

So it was decided, and the next evening Ida was put into a doolie, and in company with Mary and Little Hugh was being jolted down the hill. Whether it was the mere fact of having her face towards the seat of war, or what, for there seemed not much sense in it, but certainly she was rather better than worse at Pindee, and very decidedly better by the time they reached Noushera. It would be tedious to tell how it all worked, but whether owing to the change, or the

trouble, or both, she rallied fast and steadily from that time.

The news from the front was enough—if anxiety was to have done it—to have brought about her recovery; but I think a great deal of the success of the move was owing to the fact that it took her away from herself, and herself was insupportable. It was the fellowship of trouble that helped her. She had become one of a community, moved by the same thoughts and fears. It was less use to her just now to be Ida Craven than to be “one of the soldiers’ wives.” So, getting out of herself she got away from her illness, and soon she was able to go about, joining Mary in her efforts to aid and comfort those women who were, like herself, “soldiers’ wives.” They were very busy, sometimes directing them in their work, sometimes doing it for them; there were little wardrobes that had never been in such repair before. At times helping them

through the weary evenings with reading, singing, and children's games.

Time went on, a hospital was formed at Noushera, and the more tedious cases were sent down from the front to be cared for; and Mary and Ida then set to work organizing the quantity of untrained nursing power under their hands.

Mary was surprised at the power of organization Ida showed, even before she had recovered enough physical strength to take much part in the doing. Her restlessness all flowed into the channel of work, and reviving life brought with it much that was perfectly new to her, both of power and action. She seemed to get rest by all this work. At least she managed to live in a world of facts where thoughts could not easily touch her, or if they came they were put back by the consideration—when this is done, and not till then it will be time to think.

Arthur had said: "When this business is



over, if I come out of it alive, we shall meet and decide what is best;" and so all thought of that personal matter must wait till that time should come. But she did not wait idle, as we have seen; and as she worked her interest grew stronger and stronger in what was immediately around her, as well as in the great affairs across the frontier where Arthur was working. She watched anxiously for news from the front; and when, as it came from time to time, it brought sorrow to the little community, she exerted herself to soothe and comfort, with the feeling—"It may be my turn next."

The letters she received from Arthur became a great deal of help to her, though he never varied from the impersonal record of events; but as she too was now on duty among facts, the words he sent her were at any rate in tune. He never heard in what peril of her life she had been, but on hearing she had left Murree he

wrote, "I am glad you should be at Noushera with Mrs. Maxwell; there will be plenty of work there for you both."

This gave her a little—very little—feeling of fellowship with him, and helped her on. It seemed that this work not only took her out of herself but brought her nearer to him.

And what of Hugh Linwood? The fever had done much to burn him out of his place in her head and heart; and there in the barracks and hospitals, amid facts, real sorrow, hopes and fears, there was nothing to remind her of her fever fit of passion. The impression that was most permanent was that of a fearful danger, from which she had had to draw back with an effort. After that Hugh could never be a hero to her, though there was still much to tell her that she must not see him. She heard his name from time to time from Mary, but she knew he would not come within reach of her, and she

found herself hoping greatly that some chance might send Arthur to Noushera, if but for an hour.

So November wore on, with plenty of bad news coming to the little colony of women and children. Things went very seriously ill with the brave little force in the hill country. They were fixed in a narrow valley — the well-known pass of Umbeyla—unable to advance and not willing to retreat, and holding on by two pickets, the Crag and the Eagle's Nest, to the heights on either hand. These two posts were commanded by higher points, were a considerable distance from their supports, and were the objects of very frequent and sometimes successful attacks by the enemy. Three times the Crag, the most exposed of them, fell into the enemy's hands, and had to be retaken at the point of the bayonet, always with serious loss; and one fatal week, from the 13th to the 20th November, saw two of these affairs, and

more than four hundred men killed and wounded.

It was on the earliest of these dates, the 13th, when the Crag had been captured and retaken during the day, and there had been a casualty roll of one hundred and fifty-nine for the one day's work, that Colonel Craven ascended to the picket after dusk, with the object of seeing Saadut Khan, who was on duty there as a volunteer. When General Chamberlain had known he was going, he at first advised him to leave the visit alone; but finding him determined he had asked him to give some special orders to the officer commanding that post. To this he had agreed; and scrambled up the rocky path, still encumbered with dead bodies and slippery with blood, accompanied only by a couple of orderlies. Arrived at the top, he gave the countersign, and was admitted into the works, and before he went to find Saadut he asked for the officer commanding.

"Captain Linwood, sir," answered the

sentry. "There, sir, standing by the parapet."

Craven had known that Linwood was with the force serving with some hundreds of dismounted troopers; but they had not met, and Arthur had not expected to find Hugh here in charge of the little breastwork; and brave and steady as he was, he caught his breath a little at the meeting before him. He would gladly have avoided it, but that was not to be thought of now; for Craven was not the man to shun any least public duty for any personal motive whatever. Linwood's offences were serious enough. He had done what in him lay (to what extent Arthur did not know) to ruin Ida's life, and break all sacred ties for her. He had (but here came a gleam of pity) loved Ida for many years; and (now came a painful feeling) been of very real service to her. There was certainly much reason that the two men should not meet except as enemies. But one thing was clear to Arthur, that whoever might win in that

matter, Linwood had absolutely lost ; and it seemed to him, that short of shooting him, which was for the present impracticable, and not after all very much of an expedient for mending broken hearts and soothing wounded lives, there was no sort of vengeance that he, Arthur Craven, could take on the man who had injured him.

Besides, as they stood there in that little fortification, they met on ground where the relation that mattered most was their position of brother Englishmen in face of their country's foes. The times were frightfully ticklish. Colonel Craven, of all English soldiers there, was the man who had most to do with head and hand in the whole matter. The other was only a brave soldier, one among very many such ; and the older man decided that as meet they must, such should be the footing they met on ; as he walked rapidly along the line of defences to the spot where Linwood stood.

“ You are in command here ? ” he asked.

"Yes, for the time," answered the other, with much more of an effort; "Colonel B—— is down in camp looking after the wounded of his regiment. He said he would return before midnight."

Arthur then gave him his orders, which referred to the kind of signalling to be used in the event of a renewal of the attack; in conclusion he said, "It is to be hoped the enemy have had enough of it."

"We are quite ready for them if they have not," said the other quite eagerly, and Arthur could not help noticing what a handsome soldierly fellow he was. It was not a time for jealousy; they were all working with all their might against ever increasing difficulties, and the heavily weighted political, on whose shoulders rested the heaviest burden of all, had no attention left for such a passion. One thing he did remember: an obligation conferred on him nearly two months back, and soldier to soldier, man to man, he must now acknowledge it. He looked out

through the darkness for a little space towards the Bonair watchfires, silent, and at last he said abruptly.

"I have to thank you, Mr. Linwood, for your gallantry in rescuing my wife on the Murdan road two months ago."

Hugh felt utterly confused. He knew that Ida would have told the whole story as she said. Certainly Colonel Craven's gratitude was not due to him.

"You have really nothing to thank me for," he said stiffly.

"Yes, indeed," replied the other; "but for your presence and courage she must have been carried off to the hill-country a prisoner. We both thank you heartily," and he held out his hand. Hugh took it, feeling as he did so that he was sealing his own banishment, and signing with his own hands the death warrant of the passion that had been so much to him. For to take this man's hand was to surrender, to recognise the point of faithfulness that he



had so urgently striven to make Ida repudiate. But then, on the Crag picket, with death around them and about them, and the enemy in sight, the softer passions seemed to matter less, and loyalty and fellowship much more; and I think that hand-grasp was a comfort to both men. Though to Arthur, as he turned away, the thought came that he was perhaps for the last time using the "we" with reference to Ida and himself, except as a matter of form, and it struck him as one of the ironies of life that it should be used as an expression of gratitude to Hugh Linwood.

But not much time could be given to such thoughts, for many matters of importance had to be discussed with Saadut, who, besides his military work on the Crag, was the recognised channel of communication for any of the representatives of the lesser tribes who had a mind to treat; and it was not till a late hour that the commissioner passed down the rocky path, and regained the camp.

## CHAPTER XII.

### *WORK.*

PERHAPS the most terrible night of all that anxious time was that of the 20th November.

The morning of the 18th had brought news to Noushera of a change of position, and the abandonment of the posts on the Gooros mountain, of which some, specially the Eagle's Nest picket, had become familiar to the lookers on. It sounded very like a retreat under a fine name, and when the news of the next morning, the 19th, told of a very determined attack the previous day on the new position, it looked as if it had also so struck our enemies. Four officers had been killed, indeed in all these late affairs, officers had been killed out of fair proportion to the men. That means, said the observers, that the men are "funking;" the officers have to go ahead to encourage them,

and, not being properly supported, are shot down like sheep.

The whole business looked very critical. No one knew where it would end. A retreat would be a terrible disaster, the stationary position we were occupying was simply a series of small ones, and no one knew when it would be possible to advance.

It seemed to Ida that she was living closer to Arthur in these days of trial than she had ever done before. She watched all the news that came in from his point of view ; thought less of the personal dangers than any one else and more of the cause as a whole. She lived her daily life, ever conscious of that five or six thousand men stuck in a narrow gorge like rats in a trap, losing numbers, heart, and dash, with every day's fighting. Arthur was responsible for their being there ; and he was striving now less for their safety or their escape, than for the triumph of the cause. They had not only to live but to win. She knew now what his troubles were, weighted with the care of his

country's honour, and with the lives of her sons ; feeling the losses more than others, yet more ready than any to risk men's lives in pursuit of ultimate success. They were there for a purpose, and until that was accomplished any timid counsels, with a view to the saving of life or money, could only bring increase of trouble in the future.

In her conflicts on the borders of civilization, the one thing that England dares not do is to retreat. Her empire is founded firstly on strong arms, and next, and this still more, on energy and moral strength,—the indefinite something in each man's breast that has made in all times the difference between conqueror and conquered.

Once let Englishmen in India feel that there are things they dare not do, and foes in front they dare not face, and the ground they tread on, and the miles behind, become by that mere fact so much shifting quicksand. There is for them no safety that is not progress and success.

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The conquests of peace and civilization, the triumphs of justice and truth, are not ignored by our eastern fellow-subjects, but they are valuable only in proportion as they are not wanted. India submits because she feels our strength, not because she cares for our virtues. Not the less does it behove England to see that these boasted virtues of hers are facts, not words; they are the only apology she can make for her detestable position of conqueror.

This matter of the position of England in India was much in Ida's thoughts at the time; she felt the impossibility of retreat, or of any existence that was not success, and yet could not help a strong feeling of sympathy with the brave mountaineers fighting for home and faith and brotherhood, there on the slopes of the Mahabun.

The night of the 20th, we have said, brought tidings of another tough fight, and more slaughter. The Crag picket had again been captured by the enemy, and recaptured by us; but as the 71st Highlanders, led by Colonel

Hope, marched coolly up the rock, the torrents of matchlock balls, and the thick flying showers of stones, made very deadly mark on their ranks. The wail among the wives of these 71st men in the Noushera barracks was loud; no woman knew whether her home might not be desolate, and her children fatherless, so much had rumour exaggerated the really serious carnage, and it was known that Colonel Hope and the general commanding, Sir Neville Chamberlain, were both wounded. Ida and Mary went about among the frightened women in the barracks, and the excited men in the hospitals, busy and calm, anxious and able. There was something like a panic too that night. Many talked of retreat and disaster, and Ida had the opportunity to note what a despicable thing is personal fear.

She went to Mary Maxwell in the middle of the night.

"I say, Mary," she said; "this is a wretched state of things. Do you know what I am going to do? I really can't stand doing nothing."

"No, dear," answered Mary, smiling at the forcible way she spoke. "It seems we have no great amount of choice; and really we can hardly be doing better than by keeping these poor women in hand."

"I am going to Permouli," she said. "Dr. Relton says we might do some good. I shall take two of our best nurses, and when once we are there, I have no doubt that Dr. Woolett will let us help him with the wounded, who will be sent to the rear to-morrow."

"Well, I dare say," rejoined the other. "But are you able for a lot of horrors, of which our convalescent hospital can't give you much idea?"

"I think so," answered Ida.

"How shall you go?"

"I have a buggy and a horse, and I conclude after all this there must be some sort of passable road. There are patrols all along, so I shall not trouble any one for a guard. Good-bye; one of us is quite enough for the women here, and I have no bairns, so if

there is any risk it is best it should be mine."

And as Ida left to make her hurried preparations, Mary thought of the wonderful change that had taken place in her. Four weeks ago she had never thought to see her on her feet again; and there she was, very fragile-looking, but as able for all working purposes as herself, perfectly dauntless, and quite independent. What had become of her childish timidity, and her high-strung morbidness? She had noticed how little Ida had spoken of her husband all this time, how she avoided all allusions to the future, and seemed to be living entirely in each day's work and care. She made allowance for its being an abnormal state of things, and also that Ida had been raised from what looked very like the gate of the grave by all this, and supposed that she must have in a great measure gone off her ordinary lines of thought. She did seem very strangely changed all through. Once or twice when Hugh's name



had been mentioned she had seen that Ida steadied herself with an effort, and felt convinced, if ever the story of Ida's trouble was told, Hugh's name would be found to go for a good deal in it. But she was content with her friend ; Ida had fought out the fight, and won it ; and with her wonder how it would all end, was mingled no shadow of doubt that right would win, whatever share happiness might have in it all.

She went then to the great central dining-hall, back to her work, which was the simple and useful one of sending the women to bed.

It was one o'clock ; no more news could be received before daylight, and for these poor creatures to spend the night crying and frightening each other, was equally useless and bad for them. So with a few words to each, and when it was necessary, taking the children in hand, and herself undressing them, she managed to get the hall cleared, and reduced the barracks to at least outward quiet ; and then, going to the hospital, she

dismissed one of the night nurses, for she knew she could not sleep. She spent the rest of the night among the beds of the sick, sometimes going out into the verandah for air, and to look towards the hills where Harry was. Where was he, what was he doing? His duty at any rate; and she, as far as in her lay, was doing hers.

Ida reached the standing camp at Permouli in the early morning. The night had been light, and the road not bad, so she had had no difficulties.

The sentry stared at the buggy with the three women in it. She pulled up her tired horse, and said,—

“I am Colonel Craven’s wife, and want to see Dr. Woolett.”

At this the man felt still more astonished; but his orders contained no allusions to English ladies, and the commissioner’s wife had something of the halo of high authority round her head, so he pointed out to her the direction of Woolett’s tent.

He came out on hearing that a lady wanted to see him.

"We heard of yesterday's fight," said Ida; "and I came to see if you would let us help with the wounded."

Woolett looked doubtfully at her, he had not thought much at Peshawur of her powers in any practical direction, and he felt rather more embarrassed than grateful at her appearance and her offer.

Ida saw this in his face, and said,—

"I really think we shall be some good, or I would not have come. We have all three had considerable practice dressing wounds at Noushera, and saved the hospital assistants a good deal."

"But it will be very different work from that at Noushera," he said. "You had only convalescents there; here there will be some horrible things to see. Perhaps you had best——"

What he would have suggested, Ida did not wait to hear.

"We will be very steady," she said, "and perfectly obedient, I assure you."

He hesitated; he was very short-handed in his camp-hospital as the matter stood, and of course more work was coming. These women, if they would do as they were told, and not get nervous, might be really useful, when the wounded should come in from the front, which they must do in the course of the morning. He, therefore, determined to make the best of it, making one condition.

"Mrs. Craven," he said, "I have never tried volunteer 'nursing in a field-hospital, and feel very doubtful of it. Will you promise me to go back to Noushera if I find, after experiment, that it does not work?"

To this she agreed, and they went together into the tent.

"There is nothing to be done for the present," he said. "I will get you some breakfast; you may take that next tent for your own for the time. It won't be wanted while there is hard work in the pass. It is Linwood's."

Ida was too much taken up with the work in hand for the name to disturb her.

"He is in the pass, then?" she asked.

"Yes; he went up some time ago. Part of the regiment is dismounted, and doing duty up there; we have a lot here as orderlies; the roads are covered with them; but as the corps was so scattered, Stanley, Franks, and Linwood, are taking what share of work they can get to the front."

He went to his preparations, and Ida to wash and rest till she should be wanted, and thought very little of the coincidence that had located her in Hugh's tent.

The experiment was found to work really well. The women nurses were animated by one spirit. Ida had made it clear that their usefulness depended upon their being steady and obedient; and all took their part as quietly as if they had been so many hospital orderlies, till Woolett was fain to acknowledge to himself that if discipline could be attained, there was some real good

in this light woman's hand, and the sharp quick wits. Ida worked indefatigably, and became keenly interested; even wondered how little all this shocked her.

She seemed to pick up the tone that Woolett took with the men. All that could be done, must be done to the very uttermost; and, beyond that, there was no margin for attention or pity. The whole energy was thrown in the direction of relief, putting by till that was done all personal questions, and putting them by in such sort that the whole hospital,—surgeons, nurses, even patients,—felt that they were one community fighting in their way their country's battles.

Only once throughout the day did any personal feeling turn up in Ida's heart. This was towards afternoon, when, in a badly wounded man, so far gone that Woolett expressed some impatience that the surgeons to the front should have sent him down at all, as waste of time and useless

cruelty, she recognised Arthur's friend, Saadut Khan. She winced as if the pain she saw was her own.

"Will he not live, Dr. Woolett?" she asked.

"No hope," he answered. "He seems a fine fellow; more's the pity."

"Don't you know him?" she said. "It is Saadut Khan. It will be a great grief to my husband;" and tears came into her eyes.

Woolett had a man's horror of any combination of tears and work, and said, "You had better go back to the poor fellows you don't know, Mrs. Craven. You will do no good here."

"No; trust me," she said, quite steadied again. "Tell me anything I can do for him. I must, for Arthur's sake, do all I can."

"There is nothing to be done. He will want a little water from time to time, and cool air if he can get it. His breathing will be very difficult at the last. But I cannot spare you from the men who may live," he said, with the true surgeon's feeling that in

times of emergency it is a sin to the hopeful to pay much attention to the hopeless.

Ida went away with him, and obeyed all his orders, toiling through the rest of the day and through the evening, in a way that won his admiration.

"She was so workmanlike," he said afterwards.

The excitement kept her up, and when the hospital tents were hushed for the night, Ida passed noiselessly from one to the other, but always rested longest on the ground beside Saadut's couch. She did not speak much to him—he was too far gone for that; but she made use of the fact of his understanding English to find out his wants.

He would not at first speak of Arthur to her; indeed, had shown considerable impatience at her presence. But as he grew weaker, and she sat by him fanning him, and giving him drink, he looked gratefully at her, and spoke very affectionately of Arthur.



Somewhere in the still dark hours, "between the joints of night and day," he passed quietly away; and as Ida stood alone beside his bed, after having closed his eyes and laid his hands straight beside him, the thought of Arthur choked her. "My poor darling! as if he had not sorrows enough," she said to herself, and knelt down by the rude bed praying, she hardly knew what; but with the utter earnestness that the presence of death does bring into the prayers of the living. And as she prayed, Arthur and Woolett stood beside her. She rose to her feet as Woolett was saying, "You are only just too late."

Her hand stole into the passive one that hung at Arthur's side; there was no other greeting.

Woolett went on, "Mrs. Craven has been with him most of the night, and can tell you more than I can," and he left them together with the dead. Arthur stooped down, and kissed the still warm forehead of

his friend, and then flung himself on his knees, burying his face in his hands.

Ida stood silent; she saw his frame quiver with sobs he could not suppress. Her sympathy with this sorrow, so bitter and hopeless, was intense. She had never realized before how much of feeling there was in Arthur, or how dearly these two men, different in blood, race, and creed, had loved each other. She put her hand on his shoulder after a time, and said,—

“He spoke much of you all night. He knew me, and sent you greeting. He loved you very much.”

Arthur raised his head, and looked earnestly at the dead face. “It seems too much,” he said. “I thought at least I had him. He looks very happy. I suppose the dead are happy; some one would need to be. Life is too full of cares and empty of hopes.”

He spoke to himself, not heeding Ida's presence. At last he rose up, and she said quietly,—

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"Is there no room in your life for me, Arthur?"

He was not prepared for this, but still could not avoid it.

"Ida, I hardly know; I think I must do as best I can with the emptiness."

"May I not even be your friend?" she said.

"You are my wife, or nothing."

"Then I am your wife."

He looked at her; there was doubt in his face and conflict in his heart. With a strong effort he mastered himself.

"I will not owe you to pity," he said; "but if when we meet again, you can say the same words, we shall see. For to-night good-bye. I am glad you should be here."

"Are you going?" she asked.

"Yes; I have to be in camp by day-break," he said, and in a moment was gone; and very soon the clatter of horses' hoofs told that the commissioner had gone back to his public cares.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### *AT LAST.*

THERE is but little of my story left to tell. The last days of November and the early ones of December were times of great anxiety to all the authorities throughout India, but there were no more disasters. It was debated for a time very doubtfully whether the force in the Mahabun should not be recalled to the plains, and the work there virtually abandoned. Indeed the Lahore government authorised the general commanding to retreat at once after the news of the serious actions of the 18th and 20th November. But though there were found voices to suggest it, there were not found men to carry out retreat. Of those across the frontier, we may safely say that every man of them would have

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sooner died there where he stood, than have recrossed it in retreat. For a few weeks though the matter was pending; we held our ground; the assailants were disheartened, and heart grew again at the council board at Lahore, assisted by brave words and reasonable deeds of the higher authorities in the country. Though Lord Elgin had died up in the hills in November, he had been succeeded by an able and resolute official from Madras. The commander-in-chief, a capable, dauntless soldier, who had in a great measure foreseen the difficulties of the expedition, and had advised delay, now strained every nerve to prevent retreat, and his prompt measures did much to render it impossible. It was found therefore that England's interests both at the seat of the supreme government, and among the fighting men to the front, were still in hands strong enough to hold them. Men were sent, cattle and war material were sent, until the great

northern road was one long line of men and material hurrying to the war. As MacPherson had prophesied we had begun by under-estimating our work, and thus created half our own difficulties, and then with a serious effort had to go again over it all. By the early days of December, there were 25,000 men north of the Jhelum, and the little force on the Mahabun was strongly reinforced.

Soon then the advance was made, and what had been intended to be the result of a few days' march was effected after two months of very harassing work. A couple of actions in the middle of December—one in the hills, and a second in the Chumla valley, where Stanley and his Patan troopers had the satisfaction of a charge in their own fashion,—brought the whole matter to a close. We made peace as conquerors. Mulka was burned, and all the opposition that had been so strong and stiff when the English were fighting on

the defensive melted like snow in summer before Englishmen on the advance.

The one condition of British prosperity in the East is, as we have before said, progress, and never perhaps was the truth more clearly illustrated, than in this miniature war of 1863 on the Mahabun.

There is no need to tell in detail what Ida was doing during these weeks. She worked in the Permouli hospital all the time, quite converting Woolett to a belief in women nurses "if only they will do as they are told, and keep cool." She lived very much out of herself all this time, feeling as she had never felt before the bond of community and fellowship; caring more for the doings in the camp, and the words in the councils, than she could ever have supposed herself capable of caring for public matters. All that was in her of passionate indignation flashed out at the suggestion of retreat. "No wonder we don't prosper; we don't deserve to when

such are our chiefs," she said. She had very little knowledge, and no experience, but she had the right sort of heart for England's frontier wars. These public matters, war, politics, and the hospital, for the time filled up her life. If a personal feeling came into it at all, it was the satisfaction that she was working as a little one in the same task where Arthur was among the masters.

She knew her life was in the balance, but she did not dwell upon it, under this influence of real work doing round her, and a small share in it. And taught by the feeling of brotherhood with the workers, she grew, and became as a human being more, as a woman none the less. In the discipline of life, in what forms character, we think none of what we have recorded could have been spared in forming the woman she afterwards became. But among the most valuable factors of her moral growth must ever remain her share in the little frontier war.



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At last it was all over, and Ida went back to Peshawur, to wait there for her husband. He had to see the treaties through all their stages, and afterwards went down to Lahore to consult the authorities. So they did not meet till after the troops were back in cantonments, and the whole place *en gala* to fête the returning heroes, and to receive the commander-in-chief, who had come up with his camp to look at them. There was no opportunity then to arrange that personal question. Arthur was one of the special heroes. Those who knew best spoke of his indefatigable activity, his unflinching courage and steadiness under the difficulties, and they had not been slight. No one suspected him, however remotely, of having had anything to do with that suggestion of retreat. Indeed men said that it was in a very great measure owing to him that it had not been carried out. Then it was told that he was as brave as he was steady, and could in an emergency

carry his life in his hand as lightly as any boy ensign. Ida was very proud of him, and the more glad of the little share she had had in the work, as making her in some sense a comrade. The phrase "*la femme camarade*," occurred to her again, and this time she understood it.

There were balls, dinner parties, and races, field-days, inspections, parades, and expeditions to the outposts, any and all possible forms of soldierly junketting, and Colonel Craven and his wife had to take part in it all.

The January weather was lovely: bright sunshine and clear cold air; and there was every temptation to make the most of it and all the pleasant things it made possible. After the stiff work, the anxieties, and the hardships, no wonder that natural buoyancy made every one take their fill of the bright side of things, after so much of the sad. The thought of all those new made graves did not mar the mirth, but gave it a sort of mellow tenderness. The dead were not

forgotten; they had borne the brunt and fallen, and the men who had stood beside them behind the breastwork, or mounted the rocky paths by their side, had borne the brunt and lived. They had gone in for the lottery together, and some had to lose, and the winners thought very affectionately of those who had lost. But still the game was over, and they had won, and life was worth the having.

None of the winners felt so like a loser as the man whose praise was on every one's lips. Colonel Craven grew sadly out of heart after the excitement and difficulty was over. Certainly none of the fallen were remembered more affectionately than Saadut Khan. The blank was very great to Arthur. He was slow to form likings, and very loyal and true to those he made, and Saadut had had quite a special place in his life. Each had saved the other in the old days at Delhi, when Craven might have wrecked his life between boy follies and growing

indolence but for the new interest, and Craven had opened out a new life for the young Mussulman, whose career seemed done,—and now the friendship was broken short off by Saadut's death, no wonder that Arthur felt sick and bored by the mirth and fêting around him.

At last it was all over, and the chief had marched away down country again; and one morning in February, Ida returned rather late from her ride. She had been visiting some old friends in the artillery barracks, and arrived to find Arthur sitting in the chota-hazri verandah of which we have seen so much, looking gloomily out into the greenery, then in full beauty.

He seemed so occupied with his thoughts as not to notice Ida's coming. The thought passed through her mind "now or never," and she, who had hardly spoken to him at all in the rare moments when they had been alone, now went to him, and sat down on the ground beside him, and put her hand upon his knee.

"What is to be the end of this, Arthur?" she said.

He would have been glad if the question could have been delayed, but he answered,—

"You are free to choose, Ida."

"That is hardly what I want," she said. "Will you not choose for me?"

"No," he said, in a tone that sounded very disheartened; "that will not do. It seems to me all is lost between us, but any sort of conventional submission and wifely duty and the rest of it from you I will not take. Let us be sincere at least."

Ida felt rather wounded at this, but she was resolved that they must get the matter clear now.

"Well, Arthur," she said, "I have done my very uttermost in the direction of sincerity. Suppose, then, we part. What do you suggest?"

"That you go to England, live with your mother, take up anything, occupation or amusement, that will interest you most; travel

a while if you like best; make yourself a life that you will care to live; I will arrange that you want for nothing. After last year you could hardly face another autumn in the Peshawur valley; that is all the world need know about it for some time to come."

A look that puzzled Arthur came over her face, some mirth seemed not far off.

"And, Arthur," she said, "this is what you wish?"

The mirth seemed very ill-timed if this was all she had to say. He replied—

"It is what I think would be fairest and best for you."

"And you scorn all submission and wifely duty?"

"We have tried it, and it has not succeeded."

"Well, I tell you, Arthur," she said, with a little shake of the head, which had been one of her girlish peculiarities, though now unused for long, "it would take more 'submission and the rest of it' than is in me to

do that. If you tell me that for your happiness, and for penance' sake, I ought to leave you, I will do it; but I shall look on it as final, and God only knows what will become of me."

This tone appealed to him more than any submission could have done. There seemed root in it.

"I have no wish to lose you, Ida, if——" he said passionately, and then checked himself, and went back to his former tone. "I have said you are free to choose. What suggestion have you to make?"

"That we get out of this place, its swamps and its worries, next month, and go across the hills to Cashmere," she said. "You want rest as much as I want change. Let us see if life will not look a brighter thing with less work and more fresh air."

"But, Ida, there seems to me that there is a disregard of fact in this."

"I doubt it," she said.

"What then is this tie between us?"

"That I told you as we stood beside the poor fellow who died at Permouli. I meant it. I don't unsay my words."

"But you said some other ones not long before," he said.

"It seems to me I have unlived them, Arthur."

He was silent for a while. At last he said very quietly, but with a look as if some far-off hope had come in sight,—

"Well, Ida, I have had so many hard blows of all sorts of late, that it does not seem very easy for me to believe in hopes. I dare say I am over-wrought. We will try your plan; we will go and look for health on those snow passes; and if happiness should come to us, well." And it was well.

Colonel Craven's duties kept him at Peshawur until the beginning of April, but by that time he was able to hand over the division to a temporary substitute, and start with his mind at rest.

They went first to Murree, and then only



did Craven learn how near his wife had been to death's door in those October days.

No wonder she was white and thin, and looked as if she could not face much hot air and sun. There they procured hill tents and ponies, blankets, books, and tinned soup, and then journeyed up to Cashmere, going by the least frequented track, and made the most of the difficulties and hardships of the route. The time passed very pleasantly. They had plenty of hard exercise, sport of all kinds, cool air, and lovely scenery. Very little of the Cashmere valley itself, with its tamer beauties, was enough for them; and they made the difficult journey from Cashmere to Simla, enjoying that the most of all. They walked and rode, visited quaint hill villages, and explored river-beds, tested the height of passes, found ample of holiday work and play in the charming climate; spending their days in the open air, and their evenings reading and writing in their little camp.

To Ida, good health brought buoyant spirits again; nothing daunted, wearied, or vexed her. Arthur too gained strength. He had been living at an excessive strain for months, and the loss of his friend and the cessation of the strain had brought him to a point of depression from which nothing but rest and fresh air could have helped him. This it did very effectually, aided by the constant companionship of this bright girl-woman, who was growing to be so comprehensible. When he thought of last year, he could see her motives, and understand much that had made it the terrible time it had been to her. He saw less clearly, but still saw, that Ida would hardly have grown to this without some such frightful risk of shipwreck. It had brought her weakness out, and then all her strength had been, she being what she was, summoned to crush the weakness. Both were of unexpected powers, and in odd proportions. Hence her deeds and words, her illness, her working

at Permouli, and now this lady-love, bright, happy, and able, with a certain dash of haughtiness, that made her worth the winning.

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It was an early October evening, they sat on a hill-side watching the sunset, when a lower cleft gave them more than a usual view of the western sky. It was an entrancing evening, clear, mellow and still, with much softness in the air, in spite of its autumn chill. All round them were hills of various forms and kinds. Some smoothly rounded knolls to the left gave them glimpses of a path for a mile or two, where the road ran towards Simla. In front was a wide valley clad with rhododendron trees for the most part, from whence came the murmur of running waters and the tinkle of goat-bells, and above where they sat, to the right—they were just on the edge of the wood,—began a forest of tall black pines, which took a crimson glow when the sun fell on them.

In the distance they caught the sound of the gingle of bells, such as the post runners in wild places have on their staves to frighten the wild beasts. It was the dāk runner bringing out their letters from Simla : they had had none for some months.

"It is the dāk," said Arthur.

"I am very sorry," she said, so earnestly, but Arthur smiled.

"We must get back to the world sooner or later," he said. "I must be in Lahore on the 20th. What is to-day?"

"The third ; we have been married three years to-day."

Her right hand sought her wedding-ring, and she turned it round, looking straight away the valley.

He bent his head towards her.

"May be it has not been such a failure after all," he said.

She turned round quickly to him, and looked up ; there was no mistaking the look on her face ; her lips trembled and her eyes

were not clear, but he knew that she loved him at last.

"My own!" he said, holding her close to him. Her head sank upon his breast, and her face was lost in the thick masses of the brown-grey beard. "Yes; yours, Arthur," she said, very softly.

Life has been absurdly happy for them both since then, their first trial of any kind was the parting from two bright wee boys on their return to India recently.

A little while before they left, as the children stood by her knee, and she was seeking for some words that they might remember, Ida said,—

"Now, darlings, try and remember this: you, Arthur, try hardest, as you are biggest: Mamma is going away, and though you will be very happy, yet you won't find every one quite the same thing as mamma, and you will have little troubles. Whatever happens, love God and speak the truth." And she added, with a still more thoughtful look,

"If ever you have a difficult thing to do, go straight at it, and get it done."

The small fair Arthur looked wonderingly at her. It is not easy to fathom a child's comprehension, but I think he will grow a braver, nobler man, that such words were in his mother's heart to say.

THE END.

